

HOW 7 OCTOBER CHANGED THE MIDDLE EAST

THREE YEARS AFTER 7 OCTOBER: TOWARDS A 'DE FACTO NORMALISATION' BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE ARAB STATES?

By Edouard Chaplault-Maestracci and Antranig Kevorkian, International Analysts, and Pierre Clairé, International Relations Expert

This is a translation of the original French text: « Comment le 7 octobre a changé le Moyen-Orient »



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Three years after 7 October 2023, this briefing note shows how the Hamas attack redrew the lines in the Middle East: Hamas and Hezbollah decapitated, Iran struck, normalisation suspended but the interests of Israel and the Sunni Arab states aligned. It sets out the conditions for a lasting peace and a strategy against Iran’s proxies, its nuclear programme and Daesh.

THE FINDING

Three years after 7 October 2023, the balance of power in the Middle East has shifted against Iran and its proxies.

THE CAUSE

The Israeli response, followed by the American one, decapitated Hamas and Hezbollah, struck Iran’s nuclear programme and aligned the interests of Israel and the Sunni Arab states.

THE CONSEQUENCE

A lasting peace requires sidelining Hamas, reviving normalisation, keeping Iran out of the nuclear club and countering the resurgence of Daesh.

KEY FINDINGS

1,200

Israelis killed and 240 people abducted by Hamas on 7 October 2023

99%

of the Iranian projectiles fired at Israel in April 2024 were intercepted, according to the IDF

\$800m

in revenue lost every month by Egypt on the Suez Canal because of the Houthis

80 to 85%

of Hezbollah’s strike capability destroyed, according to the Israeli army

24,000

strikes carried out on Iran by Israel and the United States in nearly 40 days

20%

of the world’s oil used to pass through the Strait of Hormuz, now closed by Iran

FOREWORD

Two years ago to the day, Israel suffered the greatest trauma in its history since 1948, when the terrorist group Hamas perpetrated crimes against humanity. The attack triggered not only a war in the Gaza Strip but also a shift in the balance of power across the Middle East. Hamas sought to derail the rapprochement between the Sunni Arab states and Israel. In reality, it aligned the interests of those states by giving them a common enemy: Islamist terrorism, fuelled in particular by Iran's proxies.

The Middle East holds a place of the first importance in the history of humanity and of civilisations. That it is so often called the 'cradle of civilisation' is a reminder that two of civilisation's essential components first appeared in this region: agriculture and the earliest significant traces of settled life. Research dates the first steps of agriculture to the tenth millennium BC and places them in the 'Fertile Crescent'¹, an area particularly well suited to cultivation and settlement because of the fertility of its soils. It was also here, and more precisely in Mesopotamia², that people first put down lasting roots and formed what would later become city-states.

Mesopotamia gave rise to cuneiform writing, so called because of the wedge shape of its signs, which was used from Anatolia to Iran and from Egypt to the Elburz Mountains³. It was also the setting for the first trading relationships. Islam, a religion that emerged after Hinduism,

¹ An unofficial geographical term for the area stretching from northern Egypt to western Iran, which includes parts of Syria, Turkey and Iraq. It was so named because its shape recalls a crescent.

² Located within the Fertile Crescent, Mesopotamia corresponds essentially to present-day Iraq.

³ <https://lejournel.cnrs.fr/nos-blogs/breves-mesopotamiennes/les-ecritures-cuneiformes-comment-ca-marche>

Judaism and Christianity, was born at the beginning of the seventh century⁴ in the Arabian Peninsula⁵ and proved decisive in the rise of the Arab Empire and the spread of its civilisation.

Across the ages, the Middle East has never lost its importance in the global equation, and it matters today more than ever. Just as what happens in North America, and in the United States in particular, shapes the lives of the great majority of the planet's inhabitants, events in the Middle East resonate considerably worldwide. Whether religious, military, demographic or cultural, these events receive global media coverage and have equally global consequences. The breathtaking pace of change in communications technology also means that we all now experience the Middle East in real time.

This study sets out to present the developments that rank among the major issues facing the Middle East today. It will of course address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its renewed intensity since the terrorist attacks of 7 October, while placing it in the wider context of the 'shadow war' that Iran is waging against the State of Israel through regional proxies. These subjects must be both connected and kept distinct. The threat posed by Islamism, in security terms but also politically, will be examined in the light of events in Syria, the transnational network of the Muslim Brotherhood, the record of the 'war on terror' and the international coalition against Daesh.

⁴ The Muslim calendar begins in the year 622 of the Christian era, known as the Hijra.

⁵ <https://www.imarabe.org/fr/religion>

We will then try to imagine the future of the Middle East. How can a lasting and fair solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict be found? What is the best way to exclude Iran from the nuclear club? How can the 'Axis of Resistance' be brought down? What are the best ways to encourage the normalisation of relations between the Arab states and Israel?

CONTENTS

Foreword	4
A divided and complex region	8
A geopolitical definition	8
The role of the Sykes-Picot Agreement	10
The weight of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict	12
The religious factor, a decisive element	18
A dysfunctional Arab League, symbol of regional divisions	23
A measured US withdrawal: the end of neoconservative dominance	25
The new realities of the Middle East	29
Israel and the 'Axis of Resistance'	29
Israel against Hamas: the 7 October war	30
Hezbollah on the road to demilitarisation	38
The Houthis, the proxy that makes the Red Sea tremble	41
The 'shadow war': Iran on the back foot	44
Unrest linked to the Islamist threat	52
Syria: a new regime and new uncertainties	52
The Muslim Brotherhood, the transnational threat of political Islam	58
Since 7 October: the road to a new Middle East	65
A Middle East on the road to peace?	66
The indispensable Palestinian solution	66
Continuing down the path of normalisation between Israel and its neighbours	74
A Middle East rid of Islamism in all its forms	81
Neutralising Iran's terrorist proxies	82
Excluding Iran from the nuclear club	96
Countering the resurgence of Daesh	103
How 7 October reshaped the region	109
What consequences for Israel's election of 27 October?	109
One year after Trump's peace plan, the last obstacles	111
The first 7 October since the war against Iran: what regional consequences?	113
Conclusion	115

A DIVIDED AND COMPLEX REGION

A GEOPOLITICAL DEFINITION

While the concept of the Middle East now commands broad consensus, the situation has not always been so clear. As an item from the archives of *Le Monde* points out⁶, the notions of 'Middle East' and 'Near East' long coexisted without anyone quite knowing how to tell them apart.

This is mainly because the definition and boundaries of the region were for a long time shaped by the geopolitical interests of the various Western actors rather than by more tangible geographical criteria such as the borders of the countries that make it up. Since those interests inevitably change and vary according to the dominant power, the concept in use has shifted from one era to the next.

Before the Second World War, France spoke of the Near East (*Proche-Orient*) to designate the countries of the eastern Mediterranean in which it had a direct political interest, namely Lebanon and Syria. At the end of the First World War, the League of Nations⁷ had entrusted France with a mandate over these two countries to oversee their transition, after the end of the Ottoman Empire, to independence, a subject we will return to later.

⁶ https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1945/07/17/proche-orient-du-moyen-orient_1865347_1819218.html

⁷ Created by the Treaty of Versailles, signed on 28 June 1919, the League of Nations was the forerunner of the United Nations. Its purpose was to promote international cooperation and to achieve peace and security.

As the United States asserted its global dominance and Western interests extended to the east of the region, observers began to drop the concept of the Near East in favour of the Middle East, a term coined in 1902 by the American military strategist Alfred Mahan to designate the area between Europe, regarded as the American ‘near east’, and India, which served as the ‘far east’⁸. Rear Admiral Mahan saw this part of the globe as a potential weakness for the British in the face of the Russian threat. This clash of interests is sometimes referred to as the ‘Great Game’⁹. The area today covers Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Israel, the Palestinian territories (that is, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank), Iraq, Iran, Yemen and the Gulf states (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman and Qatar). As a sign of how widespread the term has become, the countries concerned also speak of *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (literally, the Middle East)¹⁰.

The spread of the broader concept of the Middle East reflects the widening of Western interests and of the geopolitical stakes in the region. These are, of course, economic, given the importance of the Suez Canal and the Red Sea to international trade and the hydrocarbon reserves held by the Gulf states. The region also carries particular cultural and religious significance. Moreover, because Middle Eastern countries have diasporas throughout the Western world, and in Europe in particular, regional events have global repercussions through what is sometimes called ‘the Arab street’. The Arab street is one of the factors behind the globalisation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a process that

⁸ Freeman, Chas W. Jr. ‘The Middle East, America, and the Emerging World Order’, Middle East Policy Council, address delivered at the National Research University Higher School of Economics.

⁹ Engelsberg Ideas. ‘The Geopolitics and Grand Strategy of Alfred Thayer Mahan’, 2025.

¹⁰ Florian Louis, *Atlas historique du Moyen-Orient* (Historical Atlas of the Middle East), Autrement, 2020, p. 9.

has accelerated since the start of the war in Gaza, owing notably to the role of social media but also to a political exploitation of the conflict to which we will return below.

In this respect, the conflict between Israel and Hamas crystallises tensions, and it has intensified since the terrorist movement's attack on 7 October 2023 and the war the Jewish state launched in response. Although it does not technically meet the criteria of a war of civilisations, this conflict is part of a wider civilisational struggle that pits the Islamic Republic of Iran and its proxies, which advocate Islamised societies, against the United States, standard-bearer of democracy and universal values, and against Israel, which the mullahs' regime regards as Washington's regional vassal.

This war is causing regional upheavals that create serious security risks for Arab and European countries, which must contend in particular with a protean terrorism that knows no borders.

The role of the Sykes-Picot Agreement

On the eve of the First World War, the Ottoman Empire had lost many territories, including the Maghreb, parts of the Balkans, Cyprus and the Caucasus. Its empire nonetheless remained substantial, stretching from Istanbul to the regions south of Mecca and taking in present-day Syria, the lands that now form part of Iraq, and the Palestinian territories and Jerusalem. Then led by the Young Turks, the Ottoman Empire saw the First World War as an opportunity to tighten its grip on the territories it still held, having been forced to give up Albania after its defeat in the

First Balkan War¹¹. The empire therefore allied itself with Germany and Austria-Hungary and entered the war in the autumn of 1914¹².

As Ottoman troops suffered repeated defeats at the hands of the Triple Entente, the alliance of France, Russia and the United Kingdom, the French and British sought to use this advantage to make the Ottoman Empire implode. The idea was to provoke an uprising of the various Arab populations against the empire. The British High Commissioner in Egypt, Sir Henry McMahon, turned to the Sharif of Mecca¹³, Hussein bin Ali, and promised him an independent Arab state under his leadership in return for his support against the German and Turkish forces. At the same time, on 16 May 1916, an agreement was concluded between the United Kingdom, represented by its Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, and Paul Cambon, the French ambassador. It was first known as the Cambon-Grey agreement before the name Sykes-Picot finally stuck, because of the negotiations subsequently conducted by the British lieutenant-colonel Sir Mark Sykes and the French consul in Beirut, François Georges-Picot.

Sharing a fear that the emergence of Arab nationalism would threaten their regional interests and the stability of the territories concerned, the signatories of the Sykes-Picot Agreement decided not to relinquish control of the states located there. The agreement did provide for the dismemberment of what was then the Ottoman Empire into several Arab states, but France and Britain were to act as their guardians rather than entrust their administration to Sharif Hussein bin Ali. After the victory of

¹¹ After the Ottoman Empire's defeat by the Balkan League, the Treaty of London signed in May 1913 recognised Albania's independence.

¹² Although the alliance was signed on 2 August 1914, the Ottoman Empire officially entered the war on 29 October 1914 by bombarding the city of Odessa.

¹³ The office of sharif, traditionally held by the Hashemite family, makes its holder the protector of the holy places of Islam.

the Triple Entente and the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Sykes-Picot Agreement was definitively confirmed in 1920 at the San Remo Conference. Contrary to what is often said, the partition that resulted from this agreement did not draw borders, which were delimited later, but simply divided vast zones of influence between the British and the French. Under the agreement, the League of Nations gave France a mandate over Lebanon and Syria, while the United Kingdom received a mandate over Mesopotamia, corresponding to present-day Iraq, and over Palestine. The Palestine mandate then included the future Transjordan, which became Jordan on 25 May 1946, the present-day territory of Israel, and the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

THE WEIGHT OF THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

Events in the Palestinian territories cannot be separated from the long-standing conflict between their population and its Jewish neighbour, the State of Israel. Expressed through four Arab-Israeli wars and repeated conflicts between Palestinians and Israelis, tensions have grown still more intense since the crimes against humanity committed on 7 October 2023 by Hamas terrorists¹⁴. The Palestinian question, which today resonates around the world, has never ceased to be a source of regional discord since the Palestinian territories were placed under British mandate more than a century ago.

In 1922 the League of Nations entrusted the administration of Palestine to the British in order to curb the violence shaking the territory and to implement the Balfour Declaration of 1917. In that document, which took

¹⁴ A Palestinian offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, whose name is an acronym of *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya*, which may be translated as 'Islamic Resistance Movement', was founded in 1987 and adopted a founding charter the following year.

the form of a letter, the British government, through its then Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour, declared itself in favour of ‘the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people’. The British mandate covered Palestine alone, London having decided to exclude Transjordan in a gesture intended to placate the Arab community. The British mandate ended in 1947 without the Balfour Declaration having been given formal effect, but the document became, together with the publication of a manifesto entitled *The Jewish State*¹⁵ in which Theodor Herzl set out the theory of Zionism, one of the foundations of the State of Israel. Zionism is a doctrine and a political and religious movement advocating the creation and consolidation of a Jewish state in Palestine. The name ‘Zionism’ refers to the hill of Zion, on which the citadel of David was built¹⁶.

Faced with the complexity of the situation, the British government turned to the United Nations (hereafter the ‘UN’), which set up an ad hoc committee chaired by the Swedish jurist Emil Sandström to resolve the ‘question of Palestine’. The committee proposed a partition plan providing for the creation of two sovereign states, one Jewish and one Arab, and for Jerusalem to be given the status of an international city. The territory allotted to the Jewish state under the partition plan represented 55% of mandatory Palestine.

On 29 November 1947 the UN General Assembly voted on Resolution 181, providing for the adoption of the partition plan. It was adopted by 33 votes to 13, with 10 abstentions. Despite this vote, the partition plan was

¹⁵ Published in 1896, this manifesto argues for the creation of an independent state as the solution to the antisemitism then spreading across Europe. Theodor Herzl is regarded as the father of Zionism.

¹⁶ <https://www.lejdd.fr/international/quest-ce-que-le-sionisme-144634>

never implemented, because the Arab states unanimously refused to go along with it. The very next day, violence broke out in Jerusalem and civil war erupted in Palestine between the Jewish and Arab populations. On 14 May 1948 the United Kingdom ended its mandate over Palestine, while David Ben-Gurion, then chairman of the Jewish National Council, proclaimed the founding of the State of Israel.

A coalition of Arab states comprising Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Iraq immediately declared war on Israel, in what came to be regarded as the first Arab-Israeli war. When it ended in January 1949, Israel had driven back the Arab coalition and controlled 77% of the former British mandate territory.

The second Arab-Israeli war came in 1956 with the Suez Crisis. After the Egyptian president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, decided to nationalise the Suez Canal Company and barred ships flying the Israeli flag from the canal, Israeli troops entered the Gaza Strip and the Egyptian Sinai on 29 October that year. Israeli forces were supported by French and British bombing from 31 October. The conflict ended in a ceasefire adopted by the UN on 2 November 1956 at the urging of the United States and the former USSR. The deployment of a United Nations Emergency Force was decided in order to restore peace. This was also the first armed intervention by the ‘blue helmets’, whose origins date back to 1948¹⁷.

The third Arab-Israeli war took place in 1967: the Six-Day War, fought from 5 to 10 June 1967. In 1966 tensions ran high between Israel, Syria and Jordan, against a backdrop of border incidents and attacks by the

¹⁷ Nations Unies, Opérations de maintien de la paix. ‘Nos Casques bleus’ (Our blue helmets), ONU, 2025.

Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). But it was Egypt's expulsion of the blue helmets that was seen as the trigger for this new conflict, as Israel feared being hemmed in. The Jewish state won the war, which ended in a ceasefire declared on 10 June 1967 and saw Israel take East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights, the West Bank, the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli presence in the Sinai Peninsula was felt as an affront by the Egyptian president, Anwar Sadat. With the support of his Syrian counterpart, Hafez al-Assad, who for his part wanted to recover the Golan Heights in western Syria, he decided to launch a surprise attack to retake it on 6 October 1973. The offensive, launched on the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur¹⁸ and during Ramadan¹⁹, caught the Israeli army off guard.

Israel nevertheless managed to respond and pushed the Egyptian and Syrian troops back towards their respective capitals before a ceasefire came into force on 25 October 1973. It was not until 26 March 1979 that Israel and Egypt made peace official by signing a treaty in Washington.

In the decades that followed, the Gaza Strip went through two intifadas ('uprising' in Arabic). The first broke out on 9 December 1987, when Palestinians attacked Israeli soldiers with stones; the episode came to be known as the 'war of stones'. The Oslo Accords, signed in 1993 under the aegis of the US president Bill Clinton, brought this conflict to an end. It had cost the lives of 1,260 Palestinians, 970 Palestinians accused by their own side of having served the Israeli cause, and 205 Israelis²⁰.

¹⁸ In Jewish tradition, this day represents a divine grace of forgiveness granted to the people of Israel and to strangers.

¹⁹ The month of Ramadan, sacred to Muslims, commemorates the revelation of the Koran to the Prophet Muhammad.

²⁰ *Le Figaro*. 'Israël-Palestine : qu'est-ce qu'une intifada ?' (Israel-Palestine: what is an intifada?), *Le Figaro*, 7 December 2017.

In 2000, as the Palestinians demanded that East Jerusalem be recognised as the capital of Palestine, Israel declared that both parts of the city formed the ‘eternal and indivisible’ capital of the Jewish state. It was the visit to Jerusalem in September 2000 by Ariel Sharon, who became Israeli prime minister in 2001, that triggered the second intifada. His presence on the Temple Mount, a holy site for Jews, also known as the Esplanade of the Mosques and the third holiest site in Islam, was perceived as a provocation by the Palestinians and led to suicide bombings by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad²¹, to which the Israeli army responded with air strikes. The second intifada did not end until 2005, when Israel decided to withdraw from the Gaza Strip. The attack of 7 October 2023, in which 5,000 Hamas terrorists killed 1,200 Israelis and abducted 240, led Israel to enter Gaza once again.

The conflict has been exploited at both ends of the political spectrum, which makes any discussion or search for compromise extremely difficult. It should be stressed, however, that the parties of the far left bear a heavier share of responsibility for this state of affairs. The violence of some demonstrations in Europe, the United Kingdom and the United States, and a deliberately antisemitic and inflammatory rhetoric pursued for electoral ends, have helped to trigger the wave of antisemitism²² that has struck Western societies since the attacks of 7 October. By portraying Israelis in particular and Jews in general as uniformly colonialist and indifferent to the suffering of the Palestinian people, representatives of the Western far left demonise them and make them the target of antisemitic violence. Meanwhile, the far right proclaims its support for

²¹ Palestinian Islamic Jihad emerged in Palestine in the early 1980s and differs from Hamas in its refusal to take on any political responsibility. Favouring a more radical approach than that of the Muslim Brotherhood, Islamic Jihad draws its inspiration from the Iranian revolution of 1979.

²² <https://www.spcj.org>

Israel and tends to suggest that the Arab-Muslim world as a whole, and the Palestinians in particular, are antisemitic and support Hamas in what it presents as the prelude to a war of civilisations. While it is true that Hamas was elected by the Palestinian people, it cannot be inferred that all Palestinians condone the attacks of 7 October and share the terrorists' wish to destroy Israel. It must also be borne in mind that some of those who voted for Hamas may have done so under duress or for other reasons, or simply for want of a credible alternative. Enmity and a lack of empathy between the two peoples do exist, but they must not be generalised, or any reconciliation will become impossible. That is precisely what the leaders of the far left and the far right are doing, more or less consciously and to varying degrees. While it seems unrealistic to expect the parties concerned to abandon their respective postures, it is imperative that their voters rise to the challenge, so that irrational passion compounded by misinformation does not put a fair and lasting solution out of reach.

It is just as important to understand that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not a war of civilisations but rather a territorial conflict with wide-ranging repercussions. Jordan, after all, did not hesitate to protect Israel against Iranian attacks. Conversely, part of Western youth has embraced the Palestinian cause out of a 'woke'²³ and intersectional²⁴ logic. The complexity of the conflict is perfectly summed up by Mohamed Sifaoui, who observes that 'the one side, though raised on the Enlightenment,

²³ 'Wokeism' is a movement born in the United States that denounces the injustices and discrimination suffered by various ethnic, religious and sexual minorities.

²⁴ Intersectionality is a sociological current which holds that all forms of discrimination and oppression must be considered together and systemically. It is an extension of 'woke' thinking.

counts allies in the Muslim world, while the other, though bearing an obscurantist project, has found relays in the Western world'²⁵.

Reaching a viable and lasting solution means taking the passion out of the debate and recalling that there are not two exclusive and uniform camps. It is wrong to claim that all Israelis and the entire Western world are indifferent to Palestinian suffering. Investment in humanitarian projects, peaceful demonstrations and the divisions within Israeli and international public opinion on related issues all prove the contrary. Likewise, the Palestinian people and the Arab-Muslim world cannot be reduced to a group sharing Hamas's antisemitic and terrorist agenda. Only on this condition can a pacification of relations between Palestinians and Israelis be envisaged.

THE RELIGIOUS FACTOR, A DECISIVE ELEMENT

Before the advent of Islam at the beginning of the seventh century, several religions and beliefs coexisted in pre-Islamic Arabia, including various forms of Arab polytheism, Christianity and Judaism. The Muslim religion was practised by the Prophet Muhammad and his companions in Mecca and then in Medina. After the Prophet Muhammad's death in 632, Abu Bakr, regarded as the first convert to Islam, was appointed caliph. The 'Great Discord' (*al-fitna al-kubra*) broke out in 655 over disagreements about the appointment of the fourth caliph and the political future of Islam²⁶. The faithful who would become the Shias (literally 'the partisans') supported Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law and cousin, while the future Sunnis believed that the successor should be

²⁵ Mohamed Sifaoui, *Hamas : plongée au cœur du groupe terroriste* (Hamas: inside the terrorist group), 2024, p. 18.

²⁶ Les Clés du Moyen-Orient. 'Grande Discorde (al-Fitna al-Kubra)', *Les Clés du Moyen-Orient*, 2025.

Muawiya²⁷, the governor of Damascus. Muawiya proclaimed himself caliph in 660 and founded the Umayyad dynasty in 661. Ali was assassinated in 661 by the Kharijites, originally among his supporters, who reproached him for seeking a compromise with Muawiya²⁸.

The Kharijites thereafter formed a dissenting minority current that later split into several branches. Kharijites of the Ibadi branch are found today in Oman, Algeria, Zanzibar, Libya and Tunisia²⁹.

To this day, the religious divide between Sunnis and Shias is fundamental to understanding the Middle East, a region with between 350 and 400 million Muslims, the great majority of whom, between 85% and 90%, are Sunni.

The Sunnis, whose name derives from the term *sunna* ('tradition'), refer only to the Koran and the hadiths³⁰ and attach no sacred character to imams, whose role is simply to lead prayers. The countries where Sunnism is the majority current are Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Kuwait. Other countries, such as Yemen, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, are more divided between the two branches of Islam. Some are also home to other religions besides Islam. This is the case of Oman and Lebanon, with Christianity present in the land of the cedar.

²⁷ Vous-avez-dit-Arabe. 'Qu'est-ce que le sunnisme ?' (What is Sunnism?), Webdoc IMArab-Vous-avez-dit-Arabe, 2025.

²⁸ Vous-avez-dit-Arabe. 'En quoi consiste le kharijisme, la "troisième voie" de l'islam ?' (What is Kharijism, the 'third way' of Islam?), Webdoc IMArab, Vous-avez-dit-Arabe, 2025.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ The hadiths are the sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad.

The Shia-majority countries are Iraq, Bahrain and Iran. Shias consider the imam to be a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad and, as such, a guide for the faithful³¹. Shiism therefore naturally comes with a structured clergy³². This religious divide shows up in the relations between the countries of the Middle East and sheds important light on the geopolitical positions of the various regional actors. The religious factor and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are the two fundamental elements for understanding what is at stake in the Middle East.

The Sunni countries are the most inclined to draw closer to the West, as shown by the negotiations over the Abraham Accords, which will be discussed in more detail in the third part of this study. Brokered by the United States during Donald Trump's first administration, these accords were concluded in succession between August and December 2020 and provide for the normalisation of relations with Israel by the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco. Egypt and Jordan had already normalised their relations with the Jewish state, in 1979 and 1994 respectively.

The Shia bloc opposes this course, as shown by Iran's struggle against the United States, the 'Great Satan', against Israel and against the Sunni countries, which the Shia powers reproach for normalising relations with Tel Aviv. Iran leads the Shia axis through proxies, or regional relays: the Houthi rebels in Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Shia militias in Iraq. Bashar al-Assad's Syria was also among Tehran's allies by virtue of the fallen dictator's Alawite faith, the Alawite minority being a branch of

³¹ https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2014/06/20/au-fait-quelle-difference-entre-sunnites-et-chiites_4442319_4355770.html

³² In Shia-majority countries, the ayatollah holds the highest religious office in the clergy.

Shia Islam. This distinction rooted in the religious divide does not, however, dictate diplomatic strategy. Iran, the only country where Shiism is the state religion, was long aligned with the interests of the Western bloc, notably under the Pahlavi dynasty (also known as the Shah of Iran). Likewise, in another exception, Hamas, although Sunni, supports Shia Iran, which in return arms and finances the terrorist movement.

Religion also played a major part in the advent of the Islamic Republic in Iran. The fall of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in 1979 was the result of a many-sided popular opposition to the Westernisation of society, which Ayatollah Khomeini monopolised. Launched by the Shah in 1962, the 'White Revolution' was meant to set Iran on the path to modernisation. This modernisation, which entailed a degree of Westernisation, angered part of the opposition, embodied by Ayatollah Khomeini, in exile first in Iraq and then in France. The people's grievances against the Shah's regime were of several kinds. His economic policies drove the farming world to protest. The Iranian people bore the full brunt of the 1973 oil shock and the recession that followed. As unemployment and inflation rose, the government did nothing to support the victims of an economy in deep trouble. This economic resentment gradually took on a political dimension in the face of the authoritarian excesses of the Shah, who imprisoned opponents and crushed demonstrations through a brutal political police, the SAVAK³³. These demands were amplified by a pro-Western foreign policy, under which the Shah drew closer to the United States, angering conservative circles. These various grievances were embodied by Khomeini, who, although in exile, made skilful use of key symbols to unite the revolution under the single banner of Islam.

³³ The SAVAK was Iran's internal security and intelligence service under the Shah.

The Persepolis celebrations, held in 1971 to mark the 2,500th anniversary of the founding of the Persian Empire, perfectly illustrate both the disparate nature of Iranian society's grievances against the regime and Ayatollah Khomeini's ability to use the religious factor to fuse them into a powerful revolutionary movement. At these celebrations, whose lavishness contrasted with a collapsing economy, pre-Islamic symbols of ancient Persia were showcased at the expense of Islam, which regards them as forbidden³⁴. The ayatollah preached a just Islam, close to the people, which would supplant the revolutionary ambitions dominated by the communists. The demonstrations were led by clerics, and mosques played important strategic roles in organising them. From Paris, Khomeini's message was backed by the opposition and enjoyed Western support, as American Democrats and European intellectuals saw in it the expression of a popular will to end tyranny and establish a society ready to protect the human rights that had suffered under the Shah.

Returning to Iran on 1 February 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini sidelined the other revolutionary groups so as to become the sole face of the Iranian revolution and ensure that its religious component prevailed. A referendum was held on the question: 'Are you in favour of replacing the monarchy with an Islamic Republic whose Constitution will be approved by the nation?' Besides the vagueness surrounding the eventual content of the draft constitution, the campaign was dominated by media appearances by Shia religious leaders. The conduct of the vote was also criticised for its lack of transparency. 'Yes' won by a landslide, with between 98% and 99% of the vote, and the Islamic Republic of Iran was proclaimed on 1 April 1979.

³⁴ In Islam, polytheism (*al-shirk*) covers associationism and idolatry, both of which are regarded as sins.

A DYSFUNCTIONAL ARAB LEAGUE, SYMBOL OF REGIONAL DIVISIONS

Initiated as early as 25 September 1944 at the Alexandria Conference, which led to the signing of a protocol, the Arab League was officially founded on 22 March 1945 under the aegis of the United Kingdom by six countries: Egypt, Syria, Transjordan (the future Jordan), Iraq, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia. North Yemen joined the Arab League on 5 May of that year. Because of its influence in the Middle East and its interests in the region, and fully aware of the rise of pan-Arabism, the United Kingdom thus preferred to encourage the formation of an institution of cooperation rather than witness the emergence of a unified Arab state.

The creation of this regional organisation initially pursued several aims. As the Second World War drew to a close, several Arab countries, led by Egypt, shared a desire to protect their independence. The Arab League was also meant to be a vehicle for cooperation between Arab states on political, social, economic and geopolitical questions. The Palestinian question was indeed one of the unifying factors, even if differences later emerged over relations with Israel.

The Arab League brings together two blocs with opposing geopolitical outlooks. The Hashemite axis³⁵, made up of Jordan and Iraq, was open to cooperation with the British, while Egypt represented the current calling for more assertive independence. The Arab League, whose charter gives every independent Arab state the right to join, went on to admit new members, from Libya (1954) to the Comoros (1993), and today has 22.

³⁵ The Hashemites are the descendants of Hashim ibn Abd Manaf; they ruled Iraq from 1920 to 1958 and have ruled Jordan since 1921.

Although it comprises many institutions, the principal ones are the Council of the Arab League and the General Secretariat, a post almost continuously held by an Egyptian national.

The Arab League has never really fulfilled its role as an instrument of cooperation, however. While the Palestinian question has been a unifying factor, the League having created the Palestine Liberation Organisation in 1964 before recognising it as the sole representative of the Palestinians, relations with Israel have exposed the divisions among its members. A telling illustration was the members' reaction when Egypt and the Jewish state took the path of normalisation in 1979. Egypt, even though its capital hosted the organisation's headquarters, was expelled. This founding member was not readmitted until 1990.

The question of relations with the Jewish state remains to this day the main source of division within the institution. The path of normalisation was later followed by Jordan, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and then Morocco. While some states, such as Saudi Arabia, do not rule out following suit, a bloc including Algeria, Iraq, Libya and Lebanon opposes it. Since the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad's regime in December 2024, the Syrian authorities' position on the matter has been ambiguous. Besides the Israeli question, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 was also a source of friction, with Egypt and Syria sending troops to support the US intervention.

These fundamental geopolitical disagreements explain the Arab League's meagre record of success. Nor has it ever managed to fulfil its economic remit. It was supposed to establish a common market more or less along the lines of the European model born of the Treaty of Rome, but the

various initiatives to that end never came to fruition. In normative terms, too, the Arab League's usefulness is limited, since its decisions have no binding force on its members. Undermined by internal differences, the institution has failed to become the mouthpiece of pan-Arabism and can boast only very rare successes, such as good cooperation between some countries in the fight against terrorism.

A MEASURED US WITHDRAWAL: THE END OF NEOCONSERVATIVE DOMINANCE

The neoconservative movement took on an international dimension in the aftermath of the attacks of 11 September 2001, in the wake of the 'global war on terror' launched by George W. Bush³⁶. Famous for its hegemonic conception of foreign policy, with the military as its armed wing, neoconservatism also has a domestic aspect that should not be confused with the conservatism of William F. Buckley Jr. Buckley, regarded as one of the greatest conservative thinkers, held a 'fusionist'³⁷ conception of conservatism that combined social and moral conservatism with economic and political liberalism.

Unlike classical conservatism, which values the preservation of traditions, neoconservatism aspires to be more than a mere spirit of conservation and is more aggressive in spreading its ideology, which it does not confine within America's borders. Conservatism does not reject change, but it treats social and societal novelties with a certain caution. In this sense one can speak of a reactionary stance in the meaning given to the term by the Colombian philosopher Nicolás Gómez Dávila, for whom 'the pure reactionary is not a nostalgic dreaming of abolished pasts, but the

³⁶ <https://www.georgewbushlibrary.gov/research/topic-guides/global-war-terror>

³⁷ <https://www.nationalreview.com/magazine/2025/02/why-bill-buckleys-ideas-still-matter/>

hunter of sacred shadows on the eternal hills'. The reactionary does not reject all change or novelty on principle, but has doubts about new ideas and distrusts revolutions, whose consequences are by definition unpredictable. He prefers wisdom and doubt to exaltation and euphoria. Neoconservatism differs from conservatism in precisely this respect: it is defined by an approach of rupture³⁸. The neoconservative movement is concerned neither with the long term nor with continuity, but rather with innovation. Unlike conservatism, which is wary of any state intervention, neoconservatism relies on the state and its institutions to spread its ideas. In foreign policy, it relies on the army to play that role.

The movement originated in the 1980s, when it flourished under the Reagan administrations in opposition to the social and economic progressivism championed by the Democrats. After the fall of the Soviet bloc, its adherents sought to take advantage of the new unipolar world order to internationalise this cultural and political hegemony. Al-Qaeda's attacks of 11 September on American soil were the trigger for the extension of neoconservatism beyond the Western world through the 'global war on terror' declared by George W. Bush, who saw the United States as 'the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world'³⁹.

The military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq symbolise the influence of neoconservatism, which sought to pacify the regions concerned, rid the world of terrorism and export the American democratic model through 'regime change'. The failure of these interventions, symbolised by an unstable Iraq and the disastrous withdrawal of troops from

³⁸ https://www.causecommune-larevue.fr/conservatisme_et_n_oconservatisme

³⁹ <https://www.lesechos.fr/2002/03/les-lumieres-ambigues-du-phare-americain-686925>

Afghanistan under the Biden administration in 2021, all but sounded the death knell of neoconservative philosophy. The burden of these campaigns played a significant part in shaping the 'America First' doctrine, one of the decisive arguments behind Donald Trump's election victories.

Like neoconservatism, the America First doctrine has both domestic and international dimensions. While Donald Trump does not advocate complete isolationism, he intends to limit American interventions to what is strictly necessary⁴⁰ and refuses to let the United States go on playing the 'world's policeman', a role inherited from the Second World War⁴¹. This paradigm shift is visible in Donald Trump's diplomatic initiatives, notably in the Middle East, and in the many bilateral relationships the Republican has built in order to put American interests first in the countries and areas concerned. The latest example is the agreement reached by the Trump administration with the Houthi rebels on 6 May. While the Yemeni terrorist movement will no longer target American ships in the Red Sea, the benefit of the agreement does not extend to Israel, even though Israel is America's historic ally in the Middle East. On the economic front, the recent tour of the region in May by the founder of the MAGA movement (Make America Great Again)⁴² gave him an opportunity to demonstrate that the transactional approach prevails across every area of his policy, foreign policy included. The trip by the author of *The Art of the Deal* secured for the United States some 2,000 billion in investment and investment pledges from the countries visited,

⁴⁰ This was the case, for example, with the killing of the Iranian general Qassem Soleimani on 3 January 2020.

⁴¹ <https://revue-defense.fr/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/DEFENSE-220-Octobre-2024-JE-Branaa.pdf>

⁴² Make America Great Again.

including 1,400 billion from the United Arab Emirates over ten years⁴³. Another argument advanced by Donald Trump to justify this relative disengagement is that the United States no longer needs Middle Eastern oil and gas since becoming an energy superpower through shale gas production.

The neoconservative current, although very much in the minority compared with the MAGA movement, has not entirely disappeared from the Republican political landscape. These famous 'hawks', whom MAGA commentators accuse of wanting to drag the United States into another 'endless war'⁴⁴, favour active American support for the attacks launched by Israel against the mullahs' Iran, a subject we will discuss in detail later.

⁴³ <https://www.lesechos.fr/monde/afrique-moyen-orient/video-des-contrats-et-une-polemique-trump-acheve-sa-tournee-dans-le-golfe-2165835>

⁴⁴ <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/donald-trump-hesite-a-s-engager-militairement-aux-cotes-d-israel-20250615>

THE NEW REALITIES OF THE MIDDLE EAST

Beyond the existential war that Israel is waging against Iran's various proxies, the Middle East faces security unrest linked to an Islamist threat coming from several fronts. The fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria, combined with the resurgence of the Islamic State in countries such as Iraq and Syria, is increasing the terrorist risk. To this must be added the political influence of the Muslim Brotherhood, an organisation banned in many countries, which advocates the discreet and gradual spread of political Islam.

ISRAEL AND THE 'AXIS OF RESISTANCE'

The pogrom of 7 October had a considerable regional impact, and the war launched in response must be seen through several lenses: that of a direct confrontation between the IDF and Hamas, but also that of Tehran's imperialist ambitions. These date back to the mullahs' seizure of power in 1979 and are expressed through a transnational militia strategy known as the 'Axis of Resistance'.

When Iran fell under the yoke of the Islamic Republic proclaimed on 1 April 1979, religion took precedence over every other consideration. Ayatollah Khomeini, the regime's founder, thus set himself the mission of fighting what he regarded as its internal and external enemies. The creation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps reflected the new leaders' determination to impose Islamic law on Iranian society, its members being tasked with enforcing it. In foreign policy, the mullahs'

overriding objective is the struggle against Western values and the United States, nicknamed the 'Great Satan', which in Tehran's eyes is the supreme embodiment of those values. In this struggle, Israel was doubly a target for the ayatollah: because of its very nature as a Jewish state, and because of its ideological and military closeness to the United States.

Anxious to avoid a direct confrontation with Washington and Tel Aviv, which were militarily superior and could also count on the atomic trump card, Iran built the famous 'Axis of Resistance' by financing, arming and training militants from various movements, Shia or, in the case of Hamas, Sunni, that share its agenda. Tehran today relies on various regional actors such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthi rebels in Yemen, the Iraqi Shia militias and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, despite the latter's Sunni orientation. The role played in this scheme by Bashar al-Assad's Syria until his overthrow, as well as that of the Shia militias operating in Iraq, will be discussed later.

Israel against Hamas: the 7 October war

Although other groups operate from the Gaza Strip, Hamas, which had some 30,000 fighters before the war, is unquestionably the most significant. Originally a mere offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the Gaza Strip, the 'Islamic Resistance Movement' (*Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya*) presented itself as a charitable association and became a political body only from 1987, following the outbreak of the first intifada⁴⁵. Advocating the creation of an Islamic state and the annihilation of Israel, Hamas presents itself as a resistance movement whose aim is the liberation of Palestine. The founding of

⁴⁵ Literally 'uprising', the term 'intifada' refers to the two popular revolts that pitted the Palestinians against the Israeli army from 1987 to 1993 and from 2000 to 2005. The first intifada is also known as the 'war of stones'.

Hamas in 1987 by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin was largely the result of a split between those in the Muslim Brotherhood who gave priority to the Islamisation of the Gaza Strip and those who saw the Palestinian question as the overriding objective.

Hamas can be described as a movement that practises Islamo-nationalist terrorism. A map of its attacks shows that the group does not operate outside Israel and the Palestinian territories. Although Hamas proclaims its Islamist nature, its interpretation of certain Koranic provisions reveals its nationalist orientation. The concept of jihad, ‘sacred struggle’ or ‘holy war’, appears in several Koranic verses and is open to various interpretations⁴⁶. Hamas retains a purely territorial conception of it, citing the verse according to which ‘those who are attacked’ and ‘those who have been driven from their homes’⁴⁷ are permitted to defend themselves. Hamas’s founding charter, adopted in 1988, also bears witness to the overriding importance of the Palestinian question in the terrorist group’s arguments. Article 11 of the document thus refers to Palestine in these terms: ‘It is unlawful to renounce it or any part of it, or to give up all or part of it.’

Its obsession with Palestine earned Hamas the enmity of terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and Daesh and its exclusion from what is known as ‘global jihad’. Al-Qaeda, which upholds a globalised jihad and bases its action on the struggle against ‘infidels’ and ‘apostates’, thus reproaches Hamas for neglecting that struggle and also for taking part in the ‘democratic’ game, a reference to its election victory in 2006. Al-Qaeda

⁴⁶ Some see it as a spiritual struggle, while others regard jihad as a call to purify Islam of bad believers, to die as a martyr, or as the basis for a state monopoly on the fight against the Western presence.

⁴⁷ Surah 22, Al-Hajj (The Pilgrimage), verses 39-40.

accordingly declared that anyone killed on the path of democracy, in support of a group that does not apply sharia and chooses democracy, was not a martyr but merely a corpse⁴⁸. Article 6 of the Hamas charter, which states that ‘in the shadow of Islam, the followers of all religions can coexist in full confidence’, does not match al-Qaeda’s vision. Daesh, for its part, has no better relations with the Palestinian terrorist group, since it holds that no land may be placed above jihad and therefore accuses the Palestinian movement of committing the sin of idolatry.

The movement consists of a political bureau and an armed wing led by the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades⁴⁹, which were heavily involved in the attacks of 7 October. The two branches of the movement operate almost autonomously. The political bureau handles what might be called Hamas’s relations, whether with the population of the enclave or with its international partners, while the military wing favours discretion.

Islamic Jihad, with some ten thousand militants, is the second-largest terrorist group in the Gaza Strip. Its radicalism has shown itself in a series of suicide bombings carried out in Israel to signal the group’s opposition to the Oslo Accords of 1993. Unlike Hamas, Islamic Jihad has no ambition to play a political role in the Gaza Strip, which can paradoxically prove a problem for Hamas. Islamic Jihad systematically rejects any negotiation or truce agreement with Israel and sometimes launches attacks on the Jewish state without consulting Hamas.

⁴⁸ Foreign Affairs. ‘Gaza and Global Jihad’, ForeignAffairs.com.

⁴⁹ Named after the man who led the insurrection against the British presence in the 1930s.

Dialogue between the two organisations has not broken down, however, precisely because they are not political rivals. Islamic Jihad also emerged from the Muslim Brotherhood, which it criticised for putting too much emphasis on political Islam at the expense of the Palestinian cause. At the same time, Islamic Jihad criticises the Palestinian nationalist movements for their secularism. Hamas, whose charter refers repeatedly to the Muslim religion, escapes these criticisms even though its *raison d'être* is essentially the Palestinian cause. The terrorism practised by its militants is closer to Islamo-nationalist terrorism than to Islamic terrorism in the strict sense, whose goal would be the establishment of an Islamic state.

Beyond these fundamental ideological differences, Hamas had to contend with local competition in the form of Mahmoud Abbas's Palestinian Authority. The Authority was ultimately pushed aside at the ballot box and in the clashes that followed the election. On 25 January 2006, Hamas won an absolute majority in the Legislative Council, between 70 and 75 of the 132 seats, defeating Fatah, the Palestinian Authority's political party, and forcing the resignation of the Fatah prime minister, Ahmed Qurei. Hamas, despite being on the United States' list of terrorist organisations, then had to form a new government. It was led by a prime minister from its own ranks, Ismail Haniyeh. The transfer of power was not without violence, as shown by the toll of 320 people killed between the elections and 8 February 2007, when a government of national unity was formed after negotiations between the two parties.

The lull was short-lived, however, as fighting resumed on 10 June. Officials and militants on both sides were assassinated, the homes of Mahmoud Abbas and Ismail Haniyeh were attacked, and an imam close

to Hamas was killed by Fatah gunmen. Hamas militants took Jabalia and the north of the Gaza Strip in less than two days and drove the Palestinian Authority out of the enclave. Mahmoud Abbas declared a state of emergency and dissolved the government of national unity. The new government, never recognised by Hamas, was established in Ramallah, in the West Bank, leaving the enclave in the hands of its rival. Despite their religious differences, Hamas being Sunni and the Iranian regime Shia, Tehran saw the group, which shares its hatred of Israel, as a valuable ally in its long-distance struggle against the American enemy and its regional ally.

Iran has always provided financial support to Hamas. In the aftermath of the attacks of 7 October, the IDF seized documents according to which Iran had paid more than 230 million euros to its Palestinian ally since 2014⁵⁰. Iran also supplies Hamas with large quantities of military equipment, some of which was used on 7 October 2023. That day, Hamas launched its 'Al-Aqsa Flood' operation, firing thousands of rockets at Israel before entering its territory by air, land and sea and committing the atrocities that the world witnessed. Israel's response went beyond anything the terrorist organisation's command had expected and may well prove fatal to it. Aimed at freeing the hostages still held in the enclave, the Israeli military operation also seeks to eradicate Hamas.

After bombing and shelling the terrorist group's positions, the IDF entered the Gaza Strip on 27 October 2023. In short order, the head of Hamas's anti-tank missile network, Ibrahim al-Sahar, and the head of its

⁵⁰ <https://www.lopinion.fr/international/plus-de-230-millions-deuros-auraient-ete-verses-par-liran-au-hamas-selon-le-times>

intelligence directorate, Shadi Bahud, were eliminated. These first victories for the Israeli army were followed by more significant losses for the terrorist organisation.

Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas's political leader, was killed by an Israeli strike while in Tehran for the inauguration of the new Iranian president, Masoud Pezeshkian. The former Palestinian Authority prime minister, who lived far from Gaza, between Qatar and Turkey, had joined Hamas at its founding in 1987 and was behind the organisation's rapprochement with Iran. The death of Yahya Sinwar, head of Hamas's armed wing and mastermind of the 7 October attacks, killed by an Israeli patrol at Tal al-Sultan, near Rafah, had an even greater impact. In January 2025 Hamas confirmed the death of Mohammed Deif, the organisation's military chief. He had been killed on 13 July 2024 by an Israeli strike in the south of the Gaza Strip. More recently, Mohammed Sinwar, Yahya Sinwar's brother, who had replaced him at the head of the movement, was eliminated by an IDF strike.

On top of the loss of many of its leaders come the very large numbers of militants eliminated by Israeli forces. Obtaining a precise count of the terrorists killed is extremely difficult, since the figures are released by the Hamas Ministry of Health. Moreover, these figures, even though the UN considers them reliable, never distinguish between combatants and civilians.

While it appears that Hamas did not expect a response of such intensity from Israel, nor such a long war, the terrorist group's real intention seems to have been a purely political calculation designed to provoke just such a scenario. In launching the attacks of 7 October, Hamas could not have

been unaware that the IDF would enter the enclave. The atrocities committed by its militants could only lead to a ground offensive and a bombing campaign which, like any operation of this kind, would cause collateral damage and the deaths of many innocent people. That is the aim of Hamas's leaders. By turning the enclave into the theatre of new fighting and of an inevitable occupation, something that had not happened since 2005, Hamas propelled Gaza onto news channels around the world. It intended to use the media coverage to stir up international outrage, which would turn into pressure aimed at securing the recognition of a Palestinian state led, in practice, by Hamas.

Hamas appears to have won this media war, with a strategy of formidable cynicism. In its equation, the Palestinian population is merely an adjustment variable. Gradually forgetting the Israeli civilian victims of 7 October, public opinion has focused on the civilians of Gaza. The emotion legitimately aroused by this terrible toll leads people to overlook a fact of great importance: Hamas's tendency to use its population as a human shield and to hide among it deliberately puts civilians in danger. By scattering its weapons, fighters and facilities in buildings such as hospitals and schools, Hamas knowingly exposes them to bombardment.

Militarily outmatched by Israel, Hamas also faces growing opposition from the enclave's population. Crowds of Gazans, blaming it for failing to secure a truce and also for diverting the humanitarian supplies delivered to the Gaza Strip to support its war effort, have marched in several Palestinian towns, only to be violently suppressed by Hamas⁵¹. As early as 16 October 2023, a tweet from UNRWA denounced the terrorists for

⁵¹ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2025/03/30/hamas-beat-protester-death-oday-al-rabbay-gaza-doorstep/>

seizing fuel and medical equipment intended for civilians⁵². According to recent revelations by the IDF⁵³, this is not a new practice: the group has made the diversion of humanitarian aid one of its main sources of income.

In all likelihood, Hamas has been overwhelmed by the intensity of the war. Aware that the hostages are now the last bargaining chip at its disposal, Hamas also knows that this war of attrition will inevitably exhaust its resources. The Israeli strikes on Hamas's headquarters in Doha on 9 September show both the Netanyahu government's determination to finish off the terrorist movement and the movement's unprecedented vulnerability. The fact that the Jewish state did not hesitate to order an attack on the soil of Qatar, a country that Washington regards as an ally, has led Hamas's political leaders to start worrying about their own survival. Caught between the pressure of the international community, including the Arab countries, pushing it to accept the peace deal proposed by Donald Trump, and the ever-growing presence of the IDF in the enclave, Hamas seems to have accepted that the Gaza Strip will slip out of its control. With the release of the hostages and the end of the conflict seemingly imminent, Hamas's leaders, who no longer have any room for manoeuvre, are seeking a guarantee of exile before laying down their arms.

⁵² <https://fr.timesofisrael.com/lunrwa-declare-que-le-hamas-lui-a-vole-des-fournitures-avant-de-se-retracter/>

⁵³ <https://www.i24news.tv/fr/actu/international/moyen-orient/artc-tsahal-revele-comment-le-hamas-detourne-l-aide-humanitaire-a-gaza>

Hezbollah on the road to demilitarisation

Hezbollah (literally ‘Party of God’) is both a paramilitary group and a political party. The Islamist movement dates back to the Israeli intervention in Lebanon in 1982 and arose from the meeting of Iranian influence with the desire of some members of a pre-existing group, the Amal movement, for militant action.

Founded in 1974, the Amal movement advocated equality among all Lebanese citizens, whatever their religion, and aimed in particular to close the economic gap suffered by the Shia minority in the land of the cedar. Amal was involved in the fighting between Lebanon and Israel during ‘Operation Litani’. Launched on 14 March 1978, the operation took the form of an incursion by the Israeli army into southern Lebanon to strike at Palestine Liberation Organisation militants targeting northern Israel. In 1982, Operation ‘Peace for Galilee’ saw Israeli troops besiege and take Beirut, from which they withdrew in 1985. During this conflict, some Amal militants, objecting to the leadership’s willingness to negotiate with the United States and Israel, decided to found Islamic Amal. This offshoot, backed by the Iranian regime, became the largest of the country’s Shia militias before taking the name Hezbollah and taking advantage of Israel’s withdrawal in May 2000 to gain control of southern Lebanon.

Although Hezbollah and Amal now belong to the same alliance in the Lebanese parliament, the March 8 Alliance, their relations have been marked by many tensions, and the two parties clashed notably in the ‘War of the Brothers’. This conflict broke out after Hezbollah kidnapped an American colonel who had just attended a meeting with a senior

Amal leader. Seen as an affront, the kidnapping led to a conflict that lasted from February 1988 to January 1989 and was halted only by a truce brokered through Syrian intervention. Hezbollah, regarded as a terrorist organisation in the West and also by the Arab League, primarily targeted Israel and American troops when it was founded, and bombings were its main *modus operandi*.

The day after the attacks of 7 October, the Lebanese Shia movement launched rocket fire at Israel, which retaliated with air strikes and artillery fire against the Shia militia. The exchanges of fire continued until 23 September 2024, when Israel launched a campaign of massive bombardment followed by a ground invasion of Lebanon on 30 September of that year. During these bombardments Israel struck more than 1,300 Hezbollah targets, with the twin aim of decapitating the movement and weakening its military arsenal. A ceasefire was announced on 27 November 2024.

During these clashes, Hezbollah was hit hard by the IDF. With some 50,000 fighters at the start of hostilities, Hezbollah is thought to have lost between 2,500 and 4,000 in a conflict that lasted more than a year. But it was in its chain of command that the group was hit hardest. On 27 September 2024, Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's leader since 1992, was killed in an Israeli bombing. A few days later his likely successor, Hashem Safieddine, was eliminated in another IDF strike. Already stripped of the top of its hierarchy, the Shia movement suffered a blow with heavy human and reputational consequences in the pager attack.

On 17 September 2024, a series of pager explosions took place in Lebanon. Prized by the Lebanese organisation's militants as a discreet means of communication, the pagers had been booby-trapped in advance by Mossad. The wave of explosions, detonated remotely, killed 12 people and wounded more than 2,800. The next day it was walkie-talkies that exploded, killing 20 people and wounding 450. Besides its heavy human toll, this sabotage operation by the Israeli services caught Hezbollah completely off guard, amounting to a humiliating defeat for the Lebanese Shia militia. More recently, another senior Hezbollah leader was eliminated by Israel: Khodr Said Hashem, described as one of the commanders of the al-Radwan force. The fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime, Hezbollah's historic ally, on 8 December 2024 was a further setback for the terrorist organisation, which thereby lost a key supply route used by Iran to send it weapons and equipment.

Badly shaken by its confrontation with Israel, Hezbollah now finds itself at an impasse. Deprived of most of its cadres, the Lebanese movement is in a position of weakness. Lebanon's new president, Joseph Aoun, is demanding its demilitarisation in favour of the state, so that it keeps only its functions as a political party. The initiative has the support of the United States and the Gulf states. For the moment, the statements of Naim Qassem, the party's new leader, seem to point in this direction. Questions remain, however, as to their sincerity, given that most of the organisation's ballistic missiles were not destroyed in the confrontation with Israel and that Iran has not given up supporting this important member of the 'Axis of Resistance'.

The Houthis, the proxy that makes the Red Sea tremble

The origins of the Houthi movement go back to the 1990s, when the religious leader Hussein al-Houthi led a rebellion against the president of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh, from Saada governorate in the north of the country, where the rebels then operated as mere armed factions. In a Sunni-majority country, the Houthis⁵⁴ are an exception, adhering to a faith derived from Shiism: Zaydism. This religious current, which recognises only the first five imams and is therefore narrower than the Shiism from which it springs, accounts for 15% of Yemen's 40 million people. Their vision of Islam is radical; its adherents believe in particular that sharia⁵⁵ must prevail throughout the country. Convinced that their Zaydi culture makes them an elite within Islam, the Houthis do not hesitate to treat those of other faiths with cruelty, their own compatriots included. After the unification of Yemen in 1990, the Houthis experienced Sunni domination as deeply unjust and nursed a resentment that endures to this day against Saudi Arabia, a country they see as responsible for spreading Sunnism on Yemeni soil.

Already opposed to the government on religious grounds, the Houthis regarded President Saleh's alliance with the United States in the fight against terrorism as a betrayal. Several wars broke out between the rebels and the government in the 2000s, notably the 'Saada war' of 2004, in which the Houthi leader, Hussein al-Houthi, was killed. The organisation used the Arab Spring to take on a new dimension and radicalise further. With President Saleh ousted and power in the hands of a transitional government, the rebels struck a pact with Ali Abdullah Saleh. Eager to return to power, Saleh swelled the Houthis' ranks with

⁵⁴ Also known as 'Ansar Allah' (literally 'the partisans of God').

⁵⁵ Islamic law.

soldiers from the Republican Guard. In 2014 they marched on Sanaa and withstood the bombing campaign launched by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, seizing the capital. This coalition did not last, however: the former president Saleh took refuge in Riyadh before being assassinated by the Houthis in 2017 for trying to forge an alliance with the Saudi government. Now firmly in power, the rebels, who hold the north-west of the country with major strongholds such as Sanaa and the Red Sea port of Hodeidah, are estimated to control 60% of Yemen's population.

As members of the 'Axis of Resistance', the Houthis had enjoyed the support of Hezbollah and of Iran in their 2014 campaign against the regional Sunni powers. Now at the head of an impressive reservoir of manpower estimated at no fewer than 100,000 fighters⁵⁶, the Houthis are supplied with weapons by their Shia allies, first and foremost Tehran. Besides a Shia faith and a loathing of the United States, the Houthis share Iran's hatred of Israel. Their slogan bears witness to it: 'God is the greatest, death to America, death to Israel, curse upon the Jews, victory to Islam.' Moreover, since taking control of the north-west of the country, the rebels have had direct access to the Red Sea, a strategic location of paramount importance that Iran fully intends to exploit through them.

Since the outbreak of war in the Gaza Strip, the Houthis have repeatedly targeted Israel with salvoes of missiles and drones. While these attacks on Israeli territory have had limited effect, thanks to the performance of the Iron Dome protecting the Jewish state, the Houthi threat has proved far more formidable in the Red Sea. With 12% of maritime trade passing

⁵⁶ <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2025/04/us-targets-houthi-military-and-political-leaders-in-latest-campaign.php>

through its waters⁵⁷, the Red Sea has been the scene of numerous rebel attacks on ships flying Western flags. To disrupt traffic, the rebels use Iranian-made Shahed-136 drones in particular, which have a range of 2,000 kilometres. They also seize vessels, such as the *Galaxy Leader*. This British ship was boarded by Houthi terrorists in November 2023 and not released until January 2025. The deteriorating security environment automatically drives up the cost of shipping cargo from China to the West. Arab countries also suffer from the Houthis' attacks. The Egyptian president, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, has said that they are costing Egypt around 800 million dollars a month in lost revenue⁵⁸, enough to seriously jeopardise the target of 13 billion dollars in Suez Canal revenue for the 2025 financial year.

The Houthis were then targeted by the second Trump administration, which launched large-scale bombing of their positions in March 2025. The US president declared that the Houthis would be 'completely annihilated'. By the end of April, the United States said it had struck more than a thousand Houthi targets. Among them, the strike on the port of Ras Isa on the night of 17 to 18 April was particularly deadly, killing 80 people. Faced with such heavy losses, the Houthi rebels concluded a ceasefire with Washington. Announced by the Sultanate of Oman, this purely bilateral agreement did not, however, end hostilities between the Yemeni group and Israel. Israeli ships are still being targeted in the Red Sea. Recently, Israel intercepted a missile fired towards Jerusalem. Ben

⁵⁷ <https://www.europe1.fr/economie/attaques-des-houthis-en-mer-rouge-trafic-maritime-retards-prix-les-consequences-sur-leconomie-mondiale-4225605>

⁵⁸ <https://www.agenceecofin.com/actualites/1803-126769-canal-de-suez-legypte-perd-800-millions-par-mois-en-raison-de-s-tensions-president>

Gurion Airport, near Tel Aviv, was also targeted by a ballistic missile. Israel retaliated by bombing Sanaa airport, held by the Houthi terrorists, who then threatened to attack civilian flights.

Since the United States, which now favours a transactional approach to international relations, seems unwilling to lean on the Houthis to stop them attacking Israel, it has become vital to find a country able to exert some pressure on the terrorist group. As the Houthis are the last Iranian proxy still posing a tangible international threat, Tehran cannot be expected to urge them to end hostilities. Such a scenario cannot be entirely ruled out, however, as it could still come about as part of a nuclear agreement between Washington and Tehran, a thorny subject that we will address below. Given these uncertainties, turning to countries with major commercial interests in the Red Sea, such as Egypt or China, could be a useful alternative.

The ‘shadow war’: Iran on the back foot

Relations between Iran and Israel have not always been synonymous with enmity. Before the advent of the Islamic Republic, the two countries were in the habit of cooperating on various matters. Although Iran initially opposed the creation of the Jewish state, it was the second Muslim-majority nation, after Turkey, to recognise its existence, in 1950. Unofficial commercial and diplomatic ties existed between the two countries. From 1950, Jews from Iraq passed through Iranian territory on their way to the new Jewish state. Iran was also, at the time, one of Israel’s main oil suppliers, and Israel in return helped it to develop its expertise in medium-range ballistics. These ties between the two countries were particularly important when it came to containing the Iraqi threat from the 1950s onwards. Iraq, led by the nationalist Abd al-Karim Qasim, was a

threat to both countries. Iran's political police, the SAVAK, set up with the help of the CIA and Mossad, cooperated with the Israeli services to support the Iraqi Kurdish rebels in their struggle against Qasim's regime.

Ruled by Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi from 1941, the Persian state was then an important regional ally of the United States. In this sense, the rapprochement between Tehran and Tel Aviv also served geopolitical interests. These unofficial but cordial relations were completely overturned in 1979 with the fall of the Shah and the rise to power of Ayatollah Khomeini. Khomeini intended to end the collaboration between Iranians and Western officials and to make the country an Islamic republic at the epicentre of a regional pan-Islamism. In the mullahs' view, the United States, embodying all the vices of the West, was the ultimate ideological enemy. The struggle against what the new leaders called the 'Great Satan' became the foreign-policy priority, as did the struggle against Israel, which the Iranian regime regarded as an American extension in the Middle East, the Jewish state acquiring the nickname 'Little Satan'. Well aware that Shiism is a small minority compared with Sunni Islam, the leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran looked for a way to unite Muslims and become their standard-bearer.

As soon as the new regime was established, Tehran withdrew its recognition of Israel and broke off all diplomatic contact with its leaders. The ayatollah formed a partnership with the Palestine Liberation Organisation and immediately received Yasser Arafat on a diplomatic visit, before the PLO was given the former premises of the Israeli embassy in Tehran to house its mission. The Palestinian cause became the unifying element that Tehran needed to launch a broad anti-Western movement. Presenting the United States as an imperialist Western

menace, the mullahs found in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict an opportunity to set themselves up as defenders of the oppressed across the region. Israel was then cast as the armed wing of the Western coloniser in the Middle East. It was at this time that the foundations of the 'Axis of Resistance' were laid. In the early 1980s, as Palestinian Islamic Jihad was attacking Israel from the Gaza Strip, Iran exploited the differences between the Amal movement and some of its members to help create Lebanese Hezbollah.

It should be noted, however, that the 1980s were also the decade of the struggle between Iraq and Iran. Saddam Hussein, then at the head of Iraq, which has a large Shia population, did not want Baghdad to undergo an Islamic revolution similar to the one that had brought down Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. In September 1980 Iraqi forces invaded Iran. The West officially backed Saddam Hussein. Yet, with the help of Israel, which acted as an intermediary with Tehran, the United States supplied arms to Iran. These manoeuvres were exposed in what became known as the 'Irangate' scandal: the Reagan administration was accused of violating the embargo on Iran through these arms deliveries, the proceeds of which were used to fund the Contras, Nicaraguan rebels fighting the revolutionary government of the Sandinista National Liberation Front. On 20 August 1988 a UN resolution brought the war between Iraq and Iran to an end, allowing the mullahs to concentrate on the Israeli objective.

It was in this context that the 'shadow war' emerged. Well aware that it could not take on Israel head-on, nor its American ally and the regional powers that might be tempted to back them, Tehran turned to its proxies to damage the Jewish state's security and commercial interests. Israel

responded to the many attacks launched by Iran's proxies with targeted assassinations drawing on Mossad's expertise. These killings soon targeted scientists working on Iranian nuclear projects, as Israel was determined at all costs to prevent the mullahs from acquiring the atomic bomb. Tracked by the Israeli secret services from 2007, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, the scientist in charge of the Iranian nuclear programme, was assassinated in November 2020 with a remote-controlled machine gun.

The outbreak of war in Gaza after the terrorist attacks perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October 2023 marked an escalation of tensions between Iran and Israel. The conflict even saw the two enemies depart from the principle of covert or indirect attacks. On 1 April 2024, the Iranian consulate in Damascus, Syria, was hit by a strike attributed to Israel. The attack killed 13 people, including two generals of the Quds Force, the elite unit of the armed wing of the Islamic Revolution. Faced with a difficult geopolitical balancing act, Tehran looked for a way to retaliate while avoiding any further escalation. On the night of 13 to 14 April, Iran launched 185 drones, 110 surface-to-surface missiles and 36 cruise missiles at Israeli territory from its own soil but also from Yemen and Iraq. In this attack, the mullahs' regime targeted the Jewish state directly for the first time in its history, giving the campaign considerable symbolic weight. That weight must be qualified, however, given how ineffective the attack was. Immediately afterwards, the IDF said that it had intercepted the vast majority of the Iranian projectiles with the help of allies such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Jordan, and later claimed an interception rate of 99%. France also took part in Israel's defence by intercepting drones flying over Jordan and Iraq. Although the attack did wound several civilians, it was nonetheless a technological success for

Israel, which took the opportunity to show the superiority of its equipment over Tehran's. On 19 April Israel struck back, targeting installations in the Isfahan region, in the centre of the Persian state. An air defence battery was destroyed. Tehran chose to play down the extent of the damage and did not retaliate.

When the confrontation between Hezbollah and Israel led to an IDF ground offensive, Tehran fired 200 missiles, some of them hypersonic, as part of its Operation 'True Promise 2'. This salvo, also intended to avenge the death of Hassan Nasrallah, was once again intercepted by the Iron Dome and Israel's allies. The Jewish state responded to this attack on 26 October by targeting Iranian military installations, specifically missile production sites and missile batteries.

The confrontation between Israel and Iran, against the backdrop of the Gaza war, has turned very much in Israel's favour, especially since the air campaign that Israel launched against Iran last 13 June.

The strikes carried out by the IDF in Operation 'Rising Lion' were an undeniable military success. By targeting the Iranian regime's nuclear facilities and missile production sites, the IDF aimed to wipe out the mullahs' nuclear programme. Israeli forces also went after the human resources playing a leading role in the Persian nuclear agenda, eliminating many scientists, among them Fereydoun Abbasi, former head of the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran, and Mohammad Mehdi Tehranchi, president of Islamic Azad University. Leading military and political figures were also targeted by the Israeli army, including Hossein Salami, commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Amir Ali Hajizadeh, head of the Revolutionary Guards' Aerospace Force, and Ali

Shadmani, a close adviser to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei⁵⁹.

The Iranian response, consisting mainly of ballistic missiles fired at the Jewish state, managed to cause significant damage despite the effectiveness of Israel's Iron Dome. Time is not on Tehran's side, however, as its attacks are diminishing in intensity owing to the considerable weakening of its military capabilities. What follows this campaign, which Benjamin Netanyahu describes as pre-emptive, is uncertain and depends mainly on two actors: the Iranian regime first, but also, and above all, Donald Trump.

It was highly unlikely that Tehran would welcome the call by the 47th president of the United States for 'unconditional surrender'. For a regime whose main fuel is ideological, bowing before its sworn enemy, which it calls the 'Great Satan', would mean abandoning its *raison d'être* and disowning its doctrine, a stance that the Iranian authorities will surely find unacceptable. Moreover, a surrender by the mullahs would be an admission of weakness towards a population far from won over to the cause of the Islamic Republic, and could provoke an uprising that would spell the end of the regime.

Although it displeases the hard-line wing of the MAGA movement, and although Donald Trump has made the primacy of the America First doctrine across every area of American policy, foreign policy in particular, a defining feature of his presidency, the Iranian nuclear question carries consequences that seem to call for an offensive solution. Despite the success of the Israeli offensive, only the United States has the military

⁵⁹ https://www.bfmtv.com/international/moyen-orient/israel/infographies-iran-israel-sites-cibles-hauts-grades-et-civils-tues-comment-en-sept-jours-les-deux-pays-ont-basculé-dans-la-guerre_GN-202506200049.html

equipment capable of destroying the Fordow nuclear site. Fordow is the Iranian regime's second-largest nuclear facility. Located near the city of Qom, it is buried 80 to 90 metres underground, which puts it out of reach of the Israeli army. Apart from a ground operation, the only other option was for the United States to use the GBU-57 bomb in an attempt to destroy the Fordow site.

Faced with this dilemma, Donald Trump finally opted for an offensive solution, potentially putting a definitive end to the policy of appeasement pursued in turn by the Obama and Biden administrations. After leaving observers uncertain about a possible American intervention, the occupant of the White House struck Iran's three main known nuclear sites, Natanz, Fordow and Isfahan, in Operation 'Midnight Hammer', launched on Sunday 22 June. During the night from Friday to Saturday, the Americans had first created a diversion by sending a group of B-2 bombers, the only aircraft capable of dropping GBU-57 'bunker buster' bombs, towards the Pacific so as not to arouse Iranian suspicions. The GBU-57 has the particular feature of not exploding on impact: it penetrates beneath the surface to reach targets up to 60 metres deep. This was a significant asset for reaching underground nuclear facilities, but it was not enough to dispel all doubts about the effectiveness of such a strategy, notably those voiced by the Pentagon⁶⁰ a few days before the operation, since the Fordow site was thought to lie at a depth of between 80 and 90 metres.

⁶⁰ <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/conflit-iran-israel-le-pentagone-doute-encore-de-la-capacite-des-bombes-gbu-57-a-detruire-le-site-nucleaire-de-fordo-20250619>

Meanwhile, a group of seven B-2 Spirit bombers was approaching the Middle East, keeping communications to a minimum and refuelling in flight. Before the bomber fleet entered Iranian airspace, an American submarine launched two dozen Tomahawk cruise missiles to weaken the regime's air defences, while an escort group laid down covering fire to neutralise surface-to-air threats. The B-2 bombers then dropped 14 GBU-57 bombs, each weighing more than 13 tonnes, on the Fordow and Natanz nuclear sites. The Isfahan site was pounded with Tomahawk cruise missiles. Once the operation was over, the 'Midnight Hammer' strike group began its flight back to the United States. According to General Dan Caine, who led the operation, the 'first operational employment' of the GBU-57 inflicted 'extremely severe damage' on the Iranian nuclear sites⁶¹.

Apart from a half-hearted retaliation against an American base in Qatar, of which the Iranian services had warned the United States in advance, the mullahs did not react. A ceasefire came into force on Tuesday 24 June, ending the conflict that will henceforth be known as the '12-day war'. It left more than a thousand people dead in Iran and at least 28 dead on the Israeli side⁶². As for the Iranian nuclear sites, the precise extent of the damage inflicted by the joint Washington and Tel Aviv offensive remains unknown. In the hours after the operation, the US president hailed it as 'a spectacular military success' and said that the key sites of Iran's nuclear programme had been 'completely and totally obliterated'. The reality seems more nuanced, however, for several reasons, such as the suspicion that the mullahs moved part of their stock

⁶¹ <https://www.rts.ch/info/monde/2025/article/operation-midnight-hammer-les-details-de-l-attaque-americaine-en-iran-28921676.html>

⁶² <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/guerre-contre-israel-les-systemes-antiaeriens-endommages-ont-ete-remplaces-affirme-l-iran-20250720>

of enriched uranium before the strikes, or the unknown factor of possible secret nuclear sites. In view of these uncertainties, the Pentagon estimates that, although intelligence indicates that the targeted sites were completely destroyed, the Iranian nuclear threat has been pushed back by no more than two years⁶³. It will be imperative to use this time to exclude Iran from the nuclear club for good, as we will see below.

UNREST LINKED TO THE ISLAMIST THREAT

Besides the intensification of the shadow war between Israel and Iran and the implications of the war in the Gaza Strip that has raged since the attacks of 7 October, the Middle East also faces the threat of a resurgence of Islamist terrorism. After a US-led coalition drove the Islamic State (also known as Daesh or ISIS) out of Syria in 2019, bringing about the fall of its physical caliphate, a relative lull may have suggested that the threat posed by Daesh was now under control. The fall of Bashar al-Assad in Syria on 8 December 2024, brought about by a coalition of rebels and Islamists led by the former jihadist Ahmed al-Sharaa, could, because of the many uncertainties it entails, pave the way for ISIS to return to the fore. At the same time, the danger of political Islam, embodied in the regional influence of the Muslim Brotherhood, must not be overlooked.

Syria: a new regime and new uncertainties

One of the main reasons for the turmoil Syria has suffered since declaring independence in 1946 is the difficult coexistence of several religious groups. When France inherited the Syrian mandate following

⁶³ <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iranian-nuclear-program-degraded-by-up-two-years-pentagon-says-2025-07-02/>

the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, it shared with its British co-signatory the fear that a pan-Arab movement would emerge and threaten both its economic and political interests. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, a cultural and political movement known as al-Nahda (literally 'awakening' in Arabic) began to flourish among the intellectual elites of the various Arab countries. Born of a desire to assert Arab culture, the movement identified common vectors such as the Arabic language, brought to the fore by the work of artists and intellectuals, and the Muslim religion, and sought to affirm Arab distinctiveness. After the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire, the Western powers wanted to prevent it from becoming a reality. In Syria, France divided the country along religious lines and created four states: two for the Sunnis of Damascus and Aleppo, one for the Alawite minority and the last for the Druze community.

Founded in 1947, the Baath Party took up the torch of the al-Nahda movement. The product of a collaboration between two intellectuals, one Orthodox Christian and one Sunni, it set out to unify the Arab countries by advocating a form of socialism based on justice for the people and a nationalism rooted in Arab culture. The Baath Party also saw Islam as a means of strengthening this unification. After a series of coups, Hafez al-Assad took power and ordered the drafting of a constitution enshrining the Baath Party as 'the leader of the state and society', which was finally adopted on 13 March 1973. The rule of Hafez al-Assad, an Alawite, pushed the Sunni majority (around 70% of the population) into the ranks of the opposition. Nor was the pan-Arab project a priority for the Syrian leader. On his death in 2000, power passed to his son Bashar al-Assad, who in his early days enjoyed the image of a reforming president.

That image was irreparably tarnished by the imprisonment of his political opponents in 2005, but above all by the bloody repression of the protests that followed the local repercussions of the Arab Spring. The regime's soldiers did not hesitate to fire live rounds at demonstrators, which triggered a civil war in 2011. The war shocked international opinion for years to come when Bashar al-Assad launched a chemical weapons attack on Damascus in August 2013. The 'Ghouta massacre' claimed more than 1,200 lives and poisoned 10,000 people. The international community, owing notably to Russian opposition but also to British hesitation, did not intervene militarily in Syria. The civil war went on, and the political struggle between the rebels of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and the regime was compounded by a religious conflict pitting Syria's various minorities against increasingly influential Islamists. After 13 years of civil war, the humanitarian situation in Syria is catastrophic. With 70% of the population dependent on humanitarian aid and half displaced, an estimated 528,500 people were killed during the war, including more than 181,939 civilians⁶⁴.

It was against this background that Bashar al-Assad fell. In just 12 days, a coalition led by the group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) ended the 54-year rule of the Assad dynasty and forced Bashar al-Assad to flee. At the head of the coalition is a man with a murky profile and a jihadist past that is not so distant. Ahmed al-Sharaa, whose nom de guerre is Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, joined the jihad and al-Qaeda in 2003 to fight American forces in Iraq. He was arrested two years later and held in various prisons, including Abu Ghraib⁶⁵, before being released in 2009.

⁶⁴ <https://www.lopinion.fr/international/syrie-la-guerre-civile-a-cause-plus-de-528-500-morts-en-pres-de-quatorze-ans#:~:text=Syrie-,Syrie%3A%20la%20guerre%20civile%20a%20caus%C3%A9%20plus%20de%20528.500,en%20pr%C3%A9s%20de%20quatorze%20ans&text=Plus%20de%20181%20939%20civils,combattants%2C%20selon%20l'Observatoire.>

⁶⁵ <https://www.ft.com/content/8aa819a3-2fc7-4790-be00-b42f21ed1c4e>

When the Syrian civil war began in 2011, al-Jolani was tasked by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, then head of the Islamic State in Iraq, with founding the al-Nusra branch in Syria⁶⁶. On 9 April 2013 it was merged with the Islamic State in Iraq to form part of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. Although close to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, al-Jolani left Daesh that same year to make al-Nusra an affiliate of al-Qaeda. In 2016, Abu Mohammed al-Jolani decided to break with al-Qaeda, and his group then became Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. Al-Sharaa, who says he has distanced himself from global jihadism, ran the Idlib region in the north-west of the country from 2017. Once known for its market and its agriculture, Idlib is home to many rebel and jihadist groups. Jolani dropped the name al-Nusra in favour of Jabhat Fatah al-Sham before joining HTS in 2017. The man who has since presented himself as a repentant jihadist nonetheless remained on the US terrorist list until 20 December 2024, the US government having offered 10 million dollars for his capture. HTS's hold over this territory of 6,500 square kilometres allowed al-Sharaa to try his hand at governing. The 'Syrian Salvation Government' was conservative in outlook, but its leader denied any radicalism and even went so far as to advocate openness towards minorities.

It is precisely the fate of the Alawite, Christian and Druze minorities that has worried the international community since Ahmed al-Sharaa became Syria's interim president. Although the country's new leader constantly repeats his determination to unify Syria, he is struggling to control the most radical elements of his coalition. After half a century of Alawite rule, the Sunni majority now holds the upper hand, and the risk of revenge is high. That risk materialised last March, when Islamists used attacks by

⁶⁶ https://www.lemonde.fr/international/visuel/2025/03/15/ahmed-al-charaa-un-strategie-aux-mille-visages_6581292_3210.html

Assad loyalists as a pretext to commit atrocities of terrible violence in the coastal city of Latakia, an Alawite stronghold. During these clashes, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights counted 1,383 dead on the Alawite side⁶⁷. Violence also struck the Druze community in Jaramana and Sahnaya, towns on the outskirts of Damascus, and in Sweida province, home to most of Syria's 700,000 Druze. Around a hundred people were killed in this violence, which alarmed the community. The Druze religious leader, Hikmat al-Hijri, denounced a 'genocidal campaign' and even went so far as to call for international forces to intervene to ensure his community's safety.

With 150,000 Druze living in northern Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu sees these divisions as an opportunity to draw closer to the Druze of Syria and thus secure the border between the Jewish state and Syria. Israel does not trust the new Syrian government and had carried out a bombing campaign against Bashar al-Assad's chemical weapons stockpiles in the days after his fall. To show its support for the Druze community, Israel carried out strikes near the presidential palace in Damascus. The situation escalated significantly from 13 July, when clashes broke out in the city of Sweida between Druze and Bedouin clans after the Bedouins abducted a Druze merchant. Government troops sent by Damascus sided with the Bedouins and were accused in particular of summarily executing Druze civilians. Israel intervened once again, bombing Syrian troops and also carrying out a series of strikes on government military targets in Damascus, in the area of the presidential palace.

⁶⁷ https://www.franceinfo.fr/monde/revolte-en-syrie/affrontements-en-syrie-au-moins-1-383-civils-tues-depuis-le-6-mars-selon-un-nouveau-bilan-d-une-ong_7125711.html

A ceasefire between the Druze and the Bedouins was finally declared on 19 July, with Syrian troops withdrawing from the city of Sweida. The provisional toll released by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights stood at 1,311 dead since 13 July, most of them Druze, 194 of whom were summarily executed by members of forces under the Ministries of Defence and the Interior. To this toll must be added the 128,000 people displaced, according to the International Organisation for Migration. The Syrian government also said it had defused the crisis 'by evacuating the families of the Bedouins and tribes currently in the city of Sweida'⁶⁸. At the same time, Syria's interim president said he had decided to entrust law and order in the city to the Druze, stating that 'local factions and wise sheikhs would assume responsibility for maintaining security' in Sweida⁶⁹. Ahmed al-Sharaa explained that he had opted for a withdrawal so as not to precipitate an 'open war with the Israeli entity at the expense of our Druze people and of Syria's stability' and in order to 'give priority to the national interest'.

These intercommunal clashes are a major challenge for al-Sharaa, whose project of unifying Syria is under serious threat. Anxious to prevent minorities such as the Druze and the Kurds from seceding, Damascus's new strongman announced, shortly after taking power, his intention to unify Syria, deciding in particular that all the country's armed groups must join the government forces under the authority of the Ministry of Defence. For now, the Druze militias are divided over how to respond and refuse to hand over their light weapons to the government, against a background of mistrust both of the government's ability to protect them

⁶⁸ https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2025/07/27/les-bedouins-du-sud-syrien-les-autres-victimes-de-la-bataille-de-soueida_6624533_3210.html

⁶⁹ <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/syrie-ahmed-al-charaa-transfere-le-maintien-de-la-securite-a-soueida-aux-druzes-plus-de-350-morts-depuis-dimanche-20250717#retrait-des-troupes-syriennes-de-soueida>

and of its willingness to rein in its most radical elements, such as those that sided with the Bedouin clans. The Kurds, for their part, signed a separate agreement last March to join the government forces, but the reality on the ground suggests that the various Kurdish militias are still recruiting and arming new fighters. In a multi-faith country whose history is studded with intercommunal grievances and resentments, such a project of unification and centralisation looks premature, to say the least. Syria may instead be heading towards a federal-type arrangement that would guarantee the minorities that demand it the means to ensure their own security, within an administrative framework tied to Damascus. How this issue develops will be decisive for the image of the new Syrian authorities, who are seeking legitimacy on the international stage, and also because of its potential impact on the question of normalising relations between Damascus and Tel Aviv, which we will discuss below.

The Muslim Brotherhood, the transnational threat of political Islam

The Muslim Brotherhood is today one of the most powerful Islamist groups in the world. Its creation dates back to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and it set out to oppose the British presence in Egypt but also to make up for the Arab world's lack of unity by establishing Islam as a common value. Unlike classical pan-Arabism, which blends nationalism and socialism and regards Islam as no more than a cultural and historical vehicle, the Muslim Brotherhood sees the Muslim religion as the pillar of a future state that can only be Islamic. Founded in 1928 by the Egyptian theologian Hassan al-Banna, the group promotes the creation in Egypt of a religious state run in accordance with sharia. For this reason, the movement is described as an exponent of 'political Islam'. The Muslim Brotherhood's modus operandi stems from the group's at once political and religious nature and consists in the gradual

Islamisation of society, which can also be described as 'Islamisation from below'⁷⁰. As Florence Bergeaud-Blackler sums it up, the Muslim Brotherhood's ultimate goal is to 'bring together all Islamic currents in one great movement to establish the caliphate on earth'.

From the outset, the Muslim Brotherhood set out to guide Egyptian society back to the principles of Islam and engaged in both religious and political activities. This political and social activism showed itself notably in the group's efforts to fill the gaps left by the state in various areas, particularly social provision. Hassan al-Banna, the first Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, encouraged the creation of social, charitable and educational structures. Because of their opposition to British forces through bombings and targeted assassinations, the Muslim Brotherhood enjoyed a degree of popularity among the population and numbered more than 500,000 members by the end of the 1940s.

It was during this period that offshoots of the movement took root in various parts of the Middle East, such as Syria, Iraq and Palestine. Although they share neither a single organisation nor a common programme, each of the groups that emerged from this movement, such as Hamas or al-Qaeda, is Sunni, practises jihad and seeks to impose sharia. These orientations are rooted in the doctrine developed by Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian poet and essayist who advocated a radical and fundamentalist view of the faith, leading to Muslims judged insufficiently pious being regarded as apostates, and who called for armed struggle against the enemies of the faith, namely Jews, Christians and atheists.

⁷⁰ <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/freres-musulmans-arabie-saoudite-egypte-russie-ces-pays-qui-ont-d-ores-et-deja-in-terdit-l-organisation-20250523#:~:text=La%20confr rie%20des%20Fr res%20musulmans%2C%20organisation%20promouvant%20une%20«islamisation%20par,20%20mai%20par%20Le%20Figaro.>

Involved in the coup that brought down King Farouk in July 1952, the Muslim Brotherhood was pushed out of power by its allies, the Free Officers Movement, over disagreements about the military and secular nature of the government that the Free Officers intended to establish. After the failed assassination attempt on the leader of the Free Officers, Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Muslim Brotherhood, now banned, sought to present itself as an alternative to the regime by adopting populist positions. It was not until 1970 and the coming to power of President Anwar Sadat that the group returned to the political stage. The Muslim Brotherhood then fully embraced its political dimension by standing in parliamentary elections from 1984. When President Hosni Mubarak resigned in the wake of the Arab Spring, the Muslim Brotherhood chose Mohamed Morsi as its presidential candidate, and he became Egypt's first democratically elected president. On 3 July 2013, Mohamed Morsi was overthrown by a coalition led by General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who became Egypt's new president on 8 June 2014 and banned the Muslim Brotherhood once again. The Brotherhood has since been subjected to severe repression orchestrated by the government, which has led notably to the imprisonment of many of its members.

As mentioned earlier, the Muslim Brotherhood has offshoots in various parts of the Middle East. In Syria, the local branch of the Muslim Brotherhood was formed in the 1930s and played a key role in promoting the organisation's message when the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood was banned by President Nasser in 1954. The Brotherhood opposed the Baath Party, which advocated a secular regime. When Hafez al-Assad took power, the group proclaimed itself the representative of the Sunni cause against a regime in the hands of the Alawite minority. The government's policy of repression against the Muslim Brotherhood led to bloody

clashes, including those that struck the city of Hama several times in 1981 and 1982, after which many of the organisation's members were killed or forced into exile. Deprived of influence and local roots, the Islamic organisation used the civil war of 2011 to support opposition groups against the regime of Bashar al-Assad, which designated it a terrorist group in 2013. Present in Palestine from the 1930s, the Muslim Brotherhood increased its influence in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in the course of the wars between the Palestinians and Israel, making particular use of humanitarian leverage. Unlike other groups such as the Palestine Liberation Organisation, the Muslim Brotherhood regards the establishment of an Islamic state as an objective that takes precedence over the struggle against its Jewish neighbour. In the early 1980s some members of the organisation began to campaign for military action against Israel, which led to a split and the creation of Hamas on 14 December 1987.

The political Islam advocated by the Muslim Brotherhood is the common thread of its territorial expansion. Its preference for a strategy of gradually Islamising society, through its population and its institutions, makes its activity harder to detect than that of Islamist groups that rely exclusively on violence. Besides Egypt and Syria, many countries have decided to ban the organisation and sometimes to designate it as terrorist. Russia was a forerunner in this respect, placing the Muslim Brotherhood on its list of terrorist groups as early as 2003⁷¹. Some Arab countries, such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, followed suit in 2014. Last April, Jordan took a similar decision, arguing that the Brotherhood was on the point of arming itself and becoming a

⁷¹ https://www.bfmtv.com/societe/religions/russie-egypte-jordanie-ces-pays-qui-ont-deja-interdit-les-freres-musulmans_A-N-202505220812.html

destabilising force in the country. The Jordanian government accordingly decided to ban all its activities, close its offices and confiscate its assets on Jordanian territory⁷². It should be noted that the Brotherhood's local political wing, the Islamic Action Front, is not covered by the ban⁷³.

Europe has been slower to respond to the threat of political Islam. In 2021, Austria placed the Muslim Brotherhood on its blacklist of 'extremist groups linked to religiously motivated crime'⁷⁴. The reason for this delay no doubt lies in the slow infiltration strategy used by the Brotherhood, which gives it an appearance of respectability compared with other Islamic terrorist groups. Its strategy of infiltrating sporting, community and political circles plays the long game and calls for discretion; it is referred to as 'entryism' or 'ambient jihadism'. A report commissioned by the government and revealed by *Le Figaro* exposes the group's real influence in France and its strategy of 'institutionalisation'. With the Minister of the Interior speaking of 'a very clear threat to the Republic, a threat to national cohesion', France could in turn decide to ban activities linked to the Muslim Brotherhood. The historical precedents mentioned above reveal how dangerous the Muslim Brotherhood is to the stability of every kind of government, and a fortiori to a republic whose democratic system is more permissive than that of a military regime. These precedents, together with the bans imposed by various Middle Eastern countries, should lead France, and other European countries too, to protect themselves against the threat of political Islam by banning the organisation and designating it a terrorist group.

⁷² <https://www.france24.com/fr/moyen-orient/20250424-jordanie-freres-musulmans-interdiction-activites-securite-nationale-gouvernement>

⁷³ <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/jordanie-malgre-leur-interdiction-les-freres-musulmans-toujours-presents,8235>

⁷⁴ <https://www.marianne.net/lautriche-premier-pays-europeen-a-interdire-les-freres-musulmans>

Given the situation in Syria, the Brotherhood is likely to try to exploit the confusion surrounding the new government's early days to regain influence and local roots. The Brotherhood's strategy of Islamising politics would compete directly with Ahmed al-Sharaa's authority, so it seems unlikely that he would, of his own accord, allow the group to return officially to Syria. It is likely, however, that the Muslim Brotherhood will take another route by supporting armed groups opposed to being integrated into the Syrian forces, thereby obstructing the unification project championed by the new president, Ahmed al-Sharaa. In doing so, it could revive its influence and work from a distance towards its ultimate goal: the establishment of an Islamic state.

The rise of the Muslim Brotherhood on the Syrian political stage would also serve the interests of a Sunni power in search of regional influence: Turkey. Regarded, along with Qatar, as one of the Islamist organisation's main financial backers, Ankara could see the uncertainties surrounding the early days of Ahmed al-Sharaa's government as an opportunity for the Muslim Brotherhood to play a leading role there. Turkey, which had supported Islamist groups, including HTS, during the Syrian civil war, would gain significant advantages, particularly in its long-distance duel with Iran for regional leadership. In reputational terms, the fall of Bashar al-Assad was a snub for Ayatollah Khamenei, who had failed to stand by an important ally. It also deprives Iran of a route for delivering military equipment to its Lebanese proxy, Hezbollah. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who advocates an Islamic vision of political power, could thus count on a new political and ideological ally while also weakening the 'Axis of Resistance' to the benefit of the 'Brotherhood axis'.

According to Gilles Kepel, the political influence of Turkey and Qatar could also be combined with financial support for the new president's reconstruction project, which would further strengthen any hold this axis might gain over Damascus. Such a scenario would lend considerable weight to the thesis of a resurgence of the Ottoman Empire⁷⁵. It would also directly jeopardise the chances of success of the unification project championed by Ahmed al-Sharaa and threaten the fragile balance that Damascus's new strongman is trying to preserve between the various religious communities.

The instability inherent in any new regime and the sectarian disputes that could hinder Syria's progress towards an era of stability should prompt the local authorities and their regional and Western allies to prevent any Muslim Brotherhood entryism in Syria. In this respect, the decisions by Washington and Brussels to lift sanctions could prove decisive in offering an alternative source of funding for the country's reconstruction and thus countering the economic influence of Doha and Ankara. A new phase of instability could raise fears of a new civil war; the last one, notably, provided fertile ground for the establishment of a caliphate by Daesh in 2014.

⁷⁵ <https://www.tdg.ch/la-turquie-et-le-qatar-sont-desormais-les-maitres-de-damas-767835884109>

SINCE 7 OCTOBER: THE ROAD TO A NEW MIDDLE EAST

The Middle East is undeniably undergoing upheavals that could have a considerable influence on the region's future. The repercussions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict affect the societies of Arab countries but also those of Western countries, exposing antagonisms that are fed and aggravated by the culpable posturing of political parties adopting simplistic ideological positions in support of a cynical electoral strategy.

As noted above, the share of responsibility borne by the parties of the far left for the radicalisation of the debate is considerably greater than that of the parties at the other end of the political spectrum. This is due notably to the use of inflammatory rhetoric and to remarks that are at times openly antisemitic. The war in Gaza, whose continuation is deepening the divide in public opinion, must imperatively end in a way that satisfies both peoples as far as possible. In this respect, the Palestinian question must find an answer that only the international community can provide, so as to guarantee, first, peaceful coexistence between the two populations and, in time, a two-state solution on terms satisfactory to both parties. We will set out the conditions that seem to us indispensable for reaching a lasting peaceful solution, in order to assess the viability of the peace plan proposed by the US president, Donald Trump. The pacification of the region will depend on the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is an indispensable step towards an effective, multilateral fight against Islamist terrorism, whose possible resurgence looms over the Middle East, with direct consequences in other regions of the world such as Europe, Asia and North America.

A joint answer to the Palestinian question would also restore momentum to the policy of normalisation, an important driver of regional stability.

It will also be necessary to find a strategy capable of containing, once and for all, the threat posed by the mullahs' regime. Although the "axis of resistance" is losing significant momentum and influence, the problem posed by the Shia militias in Iraq will still have to be solved: this Iranian proxy receives media coverage in inverse proportion to its capacity for harm. Finally, the Iranian nuclear question will have to be settled firmly and definitively. In this respect, the overwhelming advantage that Washington and Tel Aviv have gained over Tehran since the 12-day war could prove a valuable asset.

A MIDDLE EAST ON THE ROAD TO PEACE?

The indispensable Palestinian solution

Ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an urgent matter, given the human toll and the humanitarian crisis caused by the war in Gaza that began after the attacks of 7 October. These events, like the clashes between Israelis and Palestinians, and those between Israel and some Arab countries such as Egypt, could probably have been avoided had Resolution 181, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 29 November 1947, not remained a dead letter. A two-state solution, adopted on terms satisfactory to all parties, can allow the two peoples to live side by side in peace. Yet the solutions put forward so far have all suffered from one or more major, even crippling, flaws, which we shall examine in chronological order. The fate of Hamas, whose physical eradication is one of the aims of Binyamin Netanyahu's government, is the main bone of contention between the parties.

At an emergency summit held in Cairo on 4 March this year, the leaders of Arab countries agreed on a \$53bn plan to rebuild the Gaza Strip. Intended as an alternative to the displacement scheme proposed by Donald Trump, the Cairo plan envisages reconstruction over five years. A reconstruction phase is indispensable, but the way the plan structured it had several shortcomings. First, management of the Strip was to be entrusted for six months to an administrative committee of non-partisan local figures, before the Palestinian Authority resumed control of Gaza. Quite apart from the impossible equation of the committee's composition, a return to power of the Palestinian Authority looks doomed to fail, so badly does it suffer from its reputation as a corrupt entity. It is also deeply unpopular among Gazans, particularly since its security forces committed violence in refugee camps in the West Bank. This was notably the case during the operation "Protect the Homeland", which aimed to retake control of the Jenin camp in January this year⁷⁶.

Beyond these problems of legitimacy, the Cairo plan did not settle the question of Hamas, whose disappearance is the number one objective of Binyamin Netanyahu and Donald Trump. First, there is no way of guaranteeing that some militants would not infiltrate the administrative committee. Second, the Arab countries gathered at the summit disagree on what place Hamas should be given. While the United Arab Emirates seems determined to keep it out of power, Egypt takes a more nuanced approach, proposing to bring other armed Palestinian factions into the governing arrangements. Such a solution would have no chance of being accepted by Tel Aviv.

⁷⁶ <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/ils-nous-torturent-et-s-amusent-a-nous-humilier-a-jenine-l-autorite-palestinienne-s-efforce-de-reprendre-la-main-20250111>

Moreover, a return of the Palestinian Authority to power is undesirable for another reason. As Jonathan Sacerdoti points out in an article published by the British conservative weekly *The Spectator*, the stance taken by Mahmoud Abbas, the leader of the Palestinian Authority, after the terrorist attacks of 7 October is disqualifying. Mr Abbas described the pogrom as a "strategic victory for the Palestinian cause"⁷⁷. More broadly, it seems clear that the leader of the Palestinian Authority does not want a peaceful solution to the conflict. As Mr Sacerdoti's article recalls, in 2008 Mr Abbas rejected a peace agreement proposed by the then Israeli prime minister, Ehud Olmert, which guaranteed the creation of a Palestinian state. In 2011 Mr Abbas wrote an op-ed in the *New York Times* in which he argued that "Palestine's admission to the United Nations would pave the way for the internationalization of the conflict as a legal matter, not only a political one." This amounted to refusing any negotiation with Israel from the outset, while calling on the international community to put pressure on the Jewish state through litigation⁷⁸. In 2014 Mr Abbas walked out of the negotiations led by John Kerry, then Barack Obama's secretary of state, against the backdrop of a refusal to recognise the existence of the State of Israel. These precedents show that the Palestinian territories will need an authority that is neither Hamas nor the Palestinian Authority if they are to make real progress towards a peaceful solution.

More recently, Ehud Olmert, a former Israeli prime minister, and Nasser al-Kidwa, a former Palestinian foreign minister and nephew of Yasser Arafat, held talks to sketch out a scenario conducive to a two-state

⁷⁷ <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-danger-of-recognising-a-palestinian-state/>

⁷⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/17/opinion/17abbas.html?searchResultPosition=1>

solution⁷⁹. Aware that Hamas is the main obstacle to this peace project, the two men propose that the terrorist group give up control of Gaza and its weapons at the same time, and become a mere political party. They add conditions under which Hamas would have to recognise the State of Israel, renounce terrorism and endorse the existing agreements between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. Ideologically, Hamas is unlikely to accept these terms: its charter states that the occupants of these lands hold only their usufruct and that the lands were "consecrated for all generations of Muslims until the Day of Resurrection"⁸⁰. Seeing Hamas lay down its arms is also highly unlikely, even though the group is in serious difficulty on the battlefield against the IDF and increasingly challenged by the enclave's population, which holds it partly responsible for its misfortunes and for the humanitarian crisis. Witness the unprecedented protests, violently suppressed by Hamas militants⁸¹.

The former Palestinian and Israeli ministers also address the West Bank. They propose that the Israelis settled in certain settlements, some 70,000 people, be given the choice between leaving those settlements or remaining on the land under the control of the Palestinian Authority. They do not, however, specify how Israelis who agree to leave would be compensated. Furthermore, and this is the plan's weakness, control of the Palestinian territories would revert to the Palestinian Authority, a solution that seems unthinkable for the reasons set out above.

⁷⁹ Le Figaro. « À Paris, Ehud Olmert et Nasser al-Qidwa rappellent l'urgence d'un État palestinien » ("In Paris, Ehud Olmert and Nasser al-Kidwa stress the urgency of a Palestinian state"), Le Figaro, 10 June 2025.

⁸⁰ Libération. « Est-il vrai que la charte du Hamas fixe comme objectif la destruction de l'État d'Israël ? » ("Is it true that the Hamas charter sets the destruction of the State of Israel as its goal?"), Libération, CheckNews, 14 October 2023.

⁸¹ The Telegraph. "Hamas beat protester to death on Gaza doorstep: Oday al-Rabbay", The Telegraph, 30 March 2025.

On 9 June this year Mahmoud Abbas, the immovable president of the Palestinian Authority, sent President Emmanuel Macron and the Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, a letter in which he states that the future Palestinian state "has no intention of becoming a militarised state"⁸². In this letter Mr Abbas condemns Hamas for the first time and promises early legislative elections. The renunciation of any militarised state and the unequivocal condemnation of Hamas are undeniable diplomatic progress. But trust in the Palestinian Authority and its leader has been too irreparably damaged for this plan to bear fruit.

All these proposals point in the right direction, but each falls short, either because it fails to settle the question of Hamas or because it would hand the management of the Palestinian territories to a political organisation that suffers from a lack of trust and whose record has already shown it incapable of curbing the threat of Islamist terrorism or of working towards a peaceful solution.

To have any chance of success, any solution must, in our view, meet a number of conditions. In addition to the immediate return of all the hostages, living or dead, still held by Palestinian terrorist organisations, the conditions listed below must be met:

(i) Security conditions:

- Hamas, together with all the Palestinian terrorist groups that took part in the attacks of 7 October, must be permanently excluded from the

⁸² https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2025/06/11/l-elysee-en-quete-d-une-dynamique-avant-de-reconnaitre-l-etat-de-palestine_6612204_3210.html

governance and political life of the future Palestinian state. Its leaders, its militants and anyone with ties of any kind to these organisations must be sent into exile.

- The future Palestinian state must necessarily be demilitarised, in order to reassure Israel and its population, whose collective psyche remains traumatised by the attacks of 7 October.
- A "de-Hamasification" campaign must be conducted to undo the indoctrination that Hamas has inflicted on the Palestinian population since it came to power following the 2006 elections.

(ii) Organisational conditions:

- The inhabitants of the Gaza Strip will have to be temporarily relocated during the reconstruction period. They must be able to return to live in the enclave once the work is complete.
- The involvement of the United States is an indispensable condition for the viability of any peace plan. As Israel's traditional ally, the United States enjoys a high degree of trust among a great many Arab and Gulf countries, thanks in particular to Donald Trump's diplomacy. Washington's presence will guarantee the effectiveness of any peace plan.
- A demilitarised state does not mean a defenceless one. The security of the Palestinian population would be ensured by two separate bodies. A peacekeeping operation modelled on UNIFIL would monitor the borders. Security for Palestinians inside the territory would be provided by a force made up of soldiers sent by the members of a coalition including the United States and any Arab country that has normalised its relations with Israel.
- Political management must be entrusted to a coalition built on the same lines until new, non-militarised political parties have been

formed and elections can be held.

- We consider it important to exclude the Palestinian Authority from any political role in the future Palestinian state.

(iii) Economic conditions: the future Palestinian state must be financed by the revenue generated by the economic activities to be developed in a demilitarised and rebuilt Gaza Strip. In addition to funding the budgets of the future Palestinian state, this revenue will be used to repay the countries involved in the reconstruction and in the administration of the enclave.

(iv) Moral condition:

- History must never forget that this war was triggered by the pogrom of 7 October. The international community has a duty to stand by Israel and its people in their mourning. To that end, setting up a tribunal to try the members of Hamas and of any organisation involved, on the model of the Nuremberg tribunal, seems an appropriate solution. The atrocities committed on 7 October are without doubt crimes against humanity that must never be forgotten.

UNRWA must be dismantled and the management of humanitarian aid entrusted to a new organisation.

As for Hamas, it is clear that it must at the very least give up its military wing and also any political power. Only at that price will the Jewish state consider placing its trust in the authorities of a Palestinian state. The complete disarmament of its militants and infrastructure under the supervision of an international coalition, together with the exile of the organisation's surviving leaders, are options that must be explored.

Caught in a vice between the IDF and popular anger among Palestinians, Hamas in any case has no other option. Hamas, which still holds living hostages and the bodies of dead ones, sees them as a means of staying in power and, at the same time, of securing recognition of a Palestinian state by the international community. The only result of this cynical calculation is an intensification of the IDF's military campaign and the prolonged suffering of the Palestinian people. Recognising a Palestinian state while Hamas is in power and still holds hostages would be a strategic and moral error that could be seen as a "reward for terrorism"⁸³. Such a scenario would be unacceptable to Israel and would not bode well for calmer relations between the two neighbours. The decision of the French president to recognise a Palestinian state on 22 September at the United Nations General Assembly, without expressly excluding Hamas from any political role within it, was perceived by Israel as a betrayal.

Once the question of Hamas has been settled, the reconstruction of the territory should be entrusted to an international coalition bringing together Arab and other countries. The presence of soldiers from each of these countries could ensure the security of the inhabitants of the Palestinian territories and that of Israelis at the same time. The countries taking part in this coalition must be chosen so as to leave no doubt about any possible partiality of their contingents. On this logic, the participation of Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Turkey or Qatar cannot be accepted.

These two measures could be accompanied by an open-ended deployment of UN peacekeepers along lines similar to UNIFIL. Backed by the presence of a coalition, the peacekeepers would find their task easier.

⁸³ Some countries, such as Mexico, Ireland, Spain, Norway and Slovenia, nevertheless decided to recognise a Palestinian state after the attacks of 7 October.

Such an intervention by the international community could allow new political parties to be formed, which Palestinians with a militant past or with any ties to Hamas or another terrorist group in the enclave would be barred from joining. Democratic elections supervised by the international coalition would be the next step. Once the new authority is in place and the situation has stabilised, the question of recognising a Palestinian state could be given serious consideration.

Only at the price of such a solution, and of a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, can the region be lastingly pacified. Such a solution must necessarily go hand in hand with the continued normalisation of relations between Israel and the Arab states. The plan put forward by Donald Trump meets many of the conditions set out above. It will nonetheless be necessary, as we propose, to create an ad hoc court allowing Israel to track down and try members of Hamas on the model of the Nuremberg tribunal. The amnesty provided for by the Trump plan does not seem acceptable to Israel. It is also worth specifying that any country taking part in the reconstruction of the enclave and of the future Palestinian state must first have normalised its relations with Israel.

As we write, negotiations are under way in Cairo to secure the acceptance of the Trump plan by all parties, which would bring this war to a definitive end and open the way to a new Middle East.

Continuing down the path of normalisation between Israel and its neighbours

Suspended by the war in Gaza, the normalisation process between the Sunni-majority Arab countries and the State of Israel is the keystone of a Middle East at peace at last.

Normalisation is a process with several stages. Such an agreement first formalises the recognition of the State of Israel by the Arab country concerned, thereby opening the way to diplomatic relations between the two countries. The logical next step is the opening of embassies to give concrete form to this dialogue. Normalisation also has an economic dimension, since it allows official trade between the countries.

The first Arab country to recognise Israel officially was Egypt, in 1979. This unprecedented stance by the Egyptian state in fact dates back to 19 November 1977, when the Egyptian president, Anwar Sadat, acknowledged Israel's existence in a speech to the Knesset⁸⁴, in return for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the territories conquered in 1967 during the third of the Arab-Israeli wars⁸⁵. The talks, held under American auspices, stalled when Menachem Begin, then Israel's prime minister, refused to return those territories and to recognise the rights of the Palestinian population. The American president, Jimmy Carter, nevertheless managed to keep the negotiations going and brought the two parties together at Camp David in early September 1978. The bargaining produced two separate agreements. The first concerned the situation in Gaza and the West Bank and provided for negotiations to give these territories transitional autonomy for a period of five years. Being rather vague, this agreement did not allow any progress on the status of the Palestinian lands.

The second agreement, signed on 17 September 1978, laid the foundations of a peace treaty and included Egypt's recognition of Israel, the establishment of diplomatic relations, the resumption of traffic

⁸⁴ The Knesset is the Israeli parliament.

⁸⁵ <https://www.lescledumoyenorient.com/Conference-de-Camp-David.html>

through the Suez Canal and the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Sinai. The peace treaty formalising these agreements was signed in Washington on 26 March 1979 by Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin.

Egypt was followed by Jordan, which signed a peace treaty⁸⁶ with Israel on 26 October 1994 in the Arava valley, between the Red Sea and the Dead Sea. The preamble of the treaty aimed to "develop friendly relations and cooperation" between the two countries, and Israel undertook to respect the "special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in Muslim holy shrines in Jerusalem"⁸⁷. This special role provoked the indignation of the Palestinians, and especially of the PLO, which considers East Jerusalem to fall under Palestinian sovereignty. Amman also undertook to give up its claim to the West Bank. In exchange for these concessions, Jordan obtained the restoration of American aid, which had been suspended during the Kuwait crisis because Amman had backed Iraq at the time⁸⁸. Owing to the controversy over this special role and to the absence of any answer to the Palestinian question, relations between the two states exist but remain distant. This was illustrated in 2018 by the non-renewal of an annex to the peace treaty that had allowed Israelis to farm Jordanian land⁸⁹ for twenty-five years under a "free use" arrangement⁹⁰.

⁸⁶ It is also known as the Wadi Araba agreement.

⁸⁷ <https://fr.timesofisrael.com/25-ans-apres-israel-et-la-jordanie-ignorent-lanniversaire-du-traite-de-paix/>

⁸⁸ <https://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/opinion-fr/jordanie-accord-israel-emirats-influence-diplomatie-normalisation>

⁸⁹ This land was located in the areas of Baqoura (northern Jordan) and Ghumar (in the south of the country).

⁹⁰ https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2019/11/11/la-jordanie-recupere-des-terres-pretees-a-israel-dans-le-cadre-d-un-accord-de-paix_6018720_3210.html

More than 25 years were then to pass before the path of normalisation was taken again. Following an initiative by Donald Trump, then the 45th president of the United States, the Abraham Accords⁹¹, made up of two treaties, were signed on 15 September 2020 between the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Israel in order to normalise their diplomatic relations and to launch economic partnerships between the signatories and Tel Aviv. Morocco then signed the Abraham Accords on 22 December 2020. Sudan and Israel also officially announced on 2 February 2023 that they had reached an agreement to "move forward with the normalisation of relations". The formal signing of the Abraham Accords is due to take place once Khartoum has managed to form a civilian government, which is not yet the case. This rapprochement also follows a geopolitical logic, since Israel and the Sunni-majority Arab signatories share an interest in containing the threat of Iran's nuclear programmes. Though an undeniable diplomatic advance, these accords suffered from a major flaw in that they relegated the Palestinian question to the background. The normalisation process suffered its first setback when Donald Trump was replaced by the Democrat Joe Biden after the American presidential election of November 2020. If the path of normalisation is frozen today, it is above all because of the persistence of the Palestinian issue and the humanitarian crisis afflicting the Gaza Strip. Saudi Arabia, for instance, rules out any normalisation of its relations with Israel until a Palestinian state has been created⁹². Normalisation remains a taboo subject in some Arab states such as Libya, where the revelation of a meeting between the Libyan foreign minister, Najla al-Mangoush, and her Israeli counterpart at

⁹¹ The name of the treaty refers to Abraham, regarded as a patriarch or a prophet, who is a figure in all three monotheistic religions.

⁹² https://www.bfmtv.com/international/moyen-orient/l-arabie-saoudite-dement-toute-normalisation-avec-israel-sans-creation-d-un-etat-palestinien_AP-202502050320.html

the time, Eli Cohen, led to Ms al-Mangoush being suspended from her post in the government⁹³.

Bringing all the parties to agree on a satisfactory solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is therefore also essential to the continued normalisation of relations between the Sunni-majority Arab countries and the Jewish state. Donald Trump's return to the White House on 20 January this year is a positive sign for the future of the Abraham Accords, given in particular his relations with the Gulf countries and especially with Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's crown prince and prime minister. This easy relationship and closeness with "MBS" were on display during the American president's four-day tour of the Middle East from 13 to 16 May this year. Besides keeping the diplomatic channel open, the visit allowed the Republican to secure investment agreements from the Gulf countries worth a record sum estimated at between \$1trn⁹⁴ and \$2trn⁹⁵.

The current talks on disarming Lebanon's Hezbollah have brought another subject to the fore: the normalisation of relations between Tel Aviv and Beirut. Israel's foreign minister, Gideon Saar, declared that Israel "is interested in expanding the circle of peace and normalization of the Abraham Accords"⁹⁶, a statement that includes Lebanon and Syria. Washington has backed the idea of widening this circle of normalisation through Tom Barrack, its special envoy to the countries concerned,

⁹³ <https://www.france24.com/fr/afrique/20230827-la-cheffe-de-la-diplomatie-libyenne-suspendue-apres-une-rencontre-avec-son-homologue-israelien>

⁹⁴ Hence the talk of a "\$1trn trip".

⁹⁵ Coface. « Donald Trump décroche près de 2000 milliards d'investissements lors de sa tournée dans le Golfe : tournant stratégique ou simple effet d'annonce ? » ("Donald Trump secures nearly \$2trn of investment on his Gulf tour: strategic turning point or mere announcement effect?"), Coface, 22 May 2025.

⁹⁶ <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/israel-se-dit-interesse-par-une-normalisation-de-ses-relations-avec-la-syrie-et-le-liban-20250630>

Lebanon and Syria. He has said that he is confident about the chances of Lebanon and Israel pacifying their border, while judging that "an agreement is a necessity"⁹⁷.

On the Lebanese side, the authorities distinguish between normalisation and pacification. President Joseph Aoun rules out, for now, any normalisation of his country's relations with the Jewish state, as shown by his statement that: "Peace is the absence of war, which is what matters to us in Lebanon at present. As for the question of normalisation, it is not on the agenda of Lebanon's current foreign policy"⁹⁸. Judging by the words used, however, normalisation, considered premature, appears to be postponed rather than rejected categorically and for good. Mr Aoun is first calling on Israel to withdraw from five positions in southern Lebanon, arguing that this presence "hinders the deployment of the army up to the border"⁹⁹. Anxious not to antagonise Hezbollah, which is already showing little enthusiasm for the prospect of being demilitarised, the Lebanese president no doubt prefers to put off the issue of normalisation. If the Lebanese authorities succeed in disarming the Shia militia and the two countries manage to agree on pacifying their common border, the question of normalisation could feature more prominently on the agenda of talks between Beirut and Tel Aviv. That, at any rate, is the thrust of American mediation: through Tom Barrack, the United States is urging Lebanon to follow Syria's example by holding talks with Israel, or risk missing the train of the new Middle East¹⁰⁰.

⁹⁷ <https://www.thearabweekly.com/barrack-sees-reshaped-middle-east-key-turkish-role-after-iran-israel-war>

⁹⁸ <https://www.cnews.fr/monde/2025-07-11/israel-le-president-libanais-exclut-toute-normalisation-avec-letat-hebreu-1710154>

⁹⁹ https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2025/07/11/le-liban-exclut-toute-normalisation-de-ses-relations-avec-israel-mais-se-prononce-en-faveur-de-la-paix_6620684_3210.html

¹⁰⁰ <https://libnanews.com/tom-barrack-au-liban-dialogue-opportunite-et-limites-americaines/>

The widening of the circle of normalisation could also run through Damascus. Tom Barrack's statement that Ahmed al-Sharaa had told him he "does not hate Israel and wants peace on that border", though it should be treated with caution given the new president's jihadist past, seems consistent with the policy of openness advocated by the master of Damascus. Israel, through its foreign minister, Gideon Saar, nevertheless specifies that the Golan Heights "will remain an integral part of the State of Israel", which does not appear to amount to a flat refusal in Mr al-Sharaa's eyes. Malik al-Abdeh, editor-in-chief of the magazine *Syria in Transition*, quoted by *L'Orient-Le Jour*, sees this as a sign that the "land for peace" formula is giving way to a new equation: "peace for peace". Ahmed al-Sharaa is well aware that a conflict with Israel would harm his quest for international legitimacy. He also wants to guard against any further Israeli interference on behalf of the Druze community, which would inevitably threaten the delicate coexistence of Syria's various communities, by reaching an agreement on this issue. The situation of the Druze community could thus be settled by delegating the security mission to local factions or by adopting a federal approach. These various reasons are pushing the Syrian president to consider a rapprochement with Israel.

Ahmed al-Sharaa knows, however, that such a project would weaken him in the eyes of the radical elements of his coalition, who are firmly opposed to the idea, and of part of his population, which links any normalisation to the question of the Golan Heights. The Syrian president is therefore considering a phased, and by definition more indirect, normalisation process. The first step would be a security agreement aimed at restoring the disengagement agreement signed by Israel and Syria in 1974. That agreement, broken after the fall of President Assad,

established a demilitarised buffer zone on the Golan Heights monitored by UN peacekeepers. While Syria's recovery of this territory seems out of the question, al-Sharaa could nonetheless obtain from Israel "access to the Golan Heights for investment purposes and freedom of movement"¹⁰¹. Reviving this agreement would be a first step towards normalisation.

Negotiations could speed up very soon. The American rabbi Abraham Cooper, who visited the new Syrian leader in Damascus in early June¹⁰², recently said that a meeting in New York between Ahmed al-Sharaa and Binyamin Netanyahu could be made possible with Donald Trump's help¹⁰³. Such an event would mark the second wind of normalisation and might also encourage Riyadh, which hosted the decisive meeting between Mr Trump and al-Sharaa in May, to take a similar initiative. This would bring Donald Trump closer to his stated goal of being awarded the Nobel peace prize. The adoption and implementation of the Trump plan for the conflict between Israel and Hamas would be a decisive factor in reviving the normalisation process.

A MIDDLE EAST RID OF ISLAMISM IN ALL ITS FORMS

The new architecture of peace in the Middle East that follows the resolution of the conflict in Gaza has the advantage of creating an immensely powerful alliance around Israel, now a major regional power, and the Sunni countries, whose interests are aligned: the defeat of Shia Islamist Iran as a regional power, and the destruction of Islamist terrorism, which is even deadlier in Arab countries than in the West.

¹⁰¹ <https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1467442/normalisation-avec-israel-chareh-pret-a-sauter-le-pas-.html>

¹⁰² <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-859815>

¹⁰³ https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/rabbi-who-met-syrias-sharaa-says-meeting-with-netanyahu-possible-with-trumps-help/

Neutralising Iran's terrorist proxies

Point 1: Ensuring the demilitarisation of Hezbollah

Although defeated by Israel and called upon to demilitarise, Hezbollah still enjoys a broad popular base, as the municipal elections held in Lebanon in May showed. Despite a lower turnout than in the 2016 municipal elections (37% against 48%), the lists of the Amal-Hezbollah alliance won 102 of the 272 municipal councils at stake in the first round in the governorates of South Lebanon and Nabatieh¹⁰⁴. Some analysts point to the absence of opposition in many of these municipalities, apart from the communists or family clans. Even so, these results are revealing of what could happen in the legislative elections due in 2026.

In this respect, disarming the group as quickly as possible is a priority. Joseph Aoun, elected president of Lebanon on 9 January this year, is aware of the importance of this objective and advocates a state monopoly on weapons. While disarmament is being insistently demanded by part of the international community, notably the United States, the president wants to reach a peaceful solution that does not appear to be imposed from abroad, so as to avoid any risk of civil war. The idea of integrating the Shia militia's fighters into the government forces, along the lines of the unification project of the new Syrian authorities, has been raised.

Although the Trump administration acknowledges that the new Lebanese authorities are proving more effective than their predecessors, it is keeping up the pressure for the militia to be fully disarmed as soon

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1461706/victoire-du-hezbollah-dans-plusieurs-localites-du-liban-sud.html>

as possible. Hezbollah, for its part, cites Israeli strikes on its facilities as grounds for refusing to lay down its arms. For now, the Israeli army estimates that between 80% and 85% of Hezbollah's strike capacity has been destroyed¹⁰⁵. The group can still, however, organise patrols or fire the odd rocket. The Lebanese army is carrying out the effective demilitarisation of the terrorist group with American backing. This financial support is vital for the Lebanese army, which lacks the funds to pay its soldiers and also suffers from inadequate equipment. The prime minister, Nawaf Salam, has also pointed out that his government will not be able to meet all its demilitarisation objectives before the coming legislative elections.

The future of this demilitarisation project nevertheless remains uncertain because of the position of Hezbollah, which rejects the idea of giving up its weapons, or even of agreeing a timetable for doing so. The terrorist group argues that Israeli strikes on its forces pose a security threat to the Land of the Cedars. The IDF, for its part, says it targets only the Lebanese militia's assets. Naim Qassem sums up Hezbollah's position thus: "Threats will not make us surrender"¹⁰⁶.

Tom Barrack, for his part, stresses that "Lebanon does not have unlimited time" to disarm Hezbollah, while recalling that "the timetable for their dismantling is set by Israel, not by Washington". The diplomat, who is of Lebanese descent, nevertheless puts courteous pressure on the Lebanese

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.i24news.tv/fr/actu/israel/artc-israel-le-commandant-du-front-nord-estime-que-le-hezbollah-a-perdu-plus-d-e-80-de-sa-capacite-de-frappe>

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/le-chef-du-hezbollah-exclut-de-capituler-et-rendre-les-armes-sous-la-menace-d-israel-20250706>

authorities, declaring that "American support presupposes an awareness of the need for change, before it is too late"¹⁰⁷.

The priority should be to secure this disarmament and establish the state's monopoly on military force as quickly as possible, so that Hezbollah does not try to resume that role on the back of, for example, a victorious legislative campaign in 2026. Integrating the militiamen into the national army is an interesting option, but it raises uncertainties about command similar to those facing Ahmed al-Sharaa in Syria. Western economic support must be sustained so that the Lebanese army can continue dismantling the group's facilities while strengthening its ranks and its arsenal.

The question of the Lebanese army's military capabilities and of Hezbollah's disarmament is all the more crucial as rumours are circulating that Washington and Tel Aviv agreed in early June to end the operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Although UNIFIL never managed to contain the threat posed by Hezbollah, the non-renewal of its mandate would make the Lebanese army the only bulwark against a revival of Hezbollah's capacity for harm. Some Israeli media claim that the Shia militia has already begun rebuilding its military capabilities¹⁰⁸. This fear was reinforced by recent remarks by Tom Barrack, who said that "the Lebanese think Hezbollah is not rebuilding. They are rebuilding". Mohammed Fneish, one of Hezbollah's political officials, recently said that the group's finances were in a "normal" state that allowed it to maintain its medical and social

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1470662/tom-barrack-le-calendrier-du-desarmement-est-fixe-par-tel-aviv-pas-washington-.html>

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1464791/le-hezbollah-est-il-en-train-de-reconstruire-ses-capacites-militaires-.html>

activities, and that the functioning of its armed wing had not been impaired¹⁰⁹.

At the same time, the international community, which has made the lifting of Lebanese banking secrecy a prerequisite for its participation in the country's economic recovery, could also make demands aimed at guaranteeing genuine representation of Lebanon's various political forces. Greater visibility for all parties, together with effective protection of their members, would be a good way of strengthening competition and diversity in the political offer at Hezbollah's expense, so that the pro-Iranian group does not benefit from the kind of absence of opposition that favoured it in the last legislative and municipal elections.

Point 2: Neutralising the Houthi threat

In view of the recent tightening of economic ties between the Americans and the Gulf countries, embodied by Donald Trump's highly lucrative tour of the Middle East, the United States could encourage Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to re-form the coalition that tried to prevent the Houthis from taking power in 2014. The security of maritime trade through the Red Sea depends on it.

At the same time, the Houthis are also being challenged by rival factions. Their impressive military arsenal, the support of Hezbollah and Iran, and an economic system that profits handsomely from smuggling tobacco, petrol and raw materials give them a clear logistical edge over the other

¹⁰⁹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2025/09/27/lebanon-hezbollah-israel-nasrallah/de7f8906-9b57-11f0-8ce3-5abc3053a693_story.html

groups. At the height of the American bombing of their positions, before a ceasefire took effect, the rival groups were considering a ground offensive towards strategic strongholds such as the port city of Hodeidah. Sources indicated that this offensive would be backed by the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, which would be able to supply some 150,000 fighters to swell the ranks of the anti-Houthi factions. The internationally recognised government of Yemen is said to have some 300,000 men. Such a coalition would therefore outnumber the Houthis. Its chances of victory, however, appear dimmed by several factors. First, government soldiers do not have the same equipment as the terrorists, whose arsenal leads the UN to describe them as a powerful military organisation¹¹⁰. Second, the Houthis have the advantage of terrain: north-western Yemen is mountainous country, which the rebels have had time to occupy and bristle with defences since 2014.

The bombing campaign of the second Trump administration looked like an interesting opening for the Houthis' rival factions, but the recent ceasefire has closed it. The imbalance of forces is such that only a large-scale bombing campaign combined with a revived coalition backed by the Gulf countries would give government forces a realistic prospect of success. Weakening the Houthis' international financial backers would also be a sensible avenue.

New sanctions targeting Iran, or diplomatic measures against Oman, the architect of the ceasefire agreement between the Houthis and the Americans, could prove effective in this respect. The sultanate of Oman, which has a privileged channel of communication with Iran and the Houthis and often acts as a mediator whenever negotiations with

¹¹⁰ <https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/how-the-houthis-went-from-ragtag-rebels-to-global-threat-5aa268d0>

Washington are involved, maintains murky relations with the Houthis and their leaders. Suspected of facilitating the delivery of some weapons, and of cash, to the group, Oman hosts Houthi leaders and gives them a platform for meeting Iranian representatives. The Omani banking system, connected to the international financial system, also gives the Houthis access to it and thus allows them to order transfers of funds.

Only a combination of these strategies, financial and military, would be likely to give a coalition a real chance of victory. Other backers, such as Egypt, whose economic interests are seriously threatened by Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, could also be called upon. The next step would be to ensure that the victorious coalition works to secure maritime trade off Yemen's coast, but also strives to end the internal fighting and to make Yemen a source of regional stability.

In the shorter term, the American administration could consider indirectly extending the benefits of its ceasefire with the Houthis to Israeli ships. One idea, for example, would be to ask the US Navy to escort certain Israeli vessels passing near the Yemeni coast in order to deter any Houthi aggression. This would deprive Iran of a proxy that inflicts heavy economic damage on Israel.

Point 3: Settling the future of Iraq

Because of his opposition to the Islamic Republic of Iran¹¹¹, the Iraqi president Saddam Hussein was long regarded by the United States as an ally. The relationship began to sour when Saddam Hussein's troops

¹¹¹ The two countries fought a war that lasted from 1980 to 1988.

invaded Kuwait in 1990, prompting an international coalition to intervene to force his withdrawal. After what was regarded as the first Gulf war, Baghdad was hit with heavy financial sanctions and subjected to inspection measures designed to ensure that the regime was not developing chemical weapons¹¹².

In 2003 the American president, George W. Bush, decided to invade Iraq to overthrow Saddam Hussein, who was suspected of supporting al-Qaeda and, above all, of possessing a large arsenal of weapons of mass destruction including chemical and biological weapons. The launch of this "preventive war" was justified by the need to stop Baghdad from using that stockpile, with George W. Bush asserting that the regime "could launch a biological or chemical attack in as little as 45 minutes". During the war, however, neither the UN nor the United States managed to gather evidence supporting this claim. It would emerge that the evidence for the invasion supplied by Tony Blair's British government had been flawed by "mistakes", as the former Labour prime minister would acknowledge¹¹³, damned by the publication of the Chilcot report in 2016¹¹⁴.

In 2011 Barack Obama announced that the war waged by his troops in Iraq was over, confirming the withdrawal of the 39,000 Americans still on Iraqi soil. While acknowledging that the loss of 4,400 soldiers in this conflict was a "high price", the Democratic president declared that the United States was leaving behind "a sovereign, stable and self-reliant Iraq, with a representative government that was elected by its people", hailing in passing "an extraordinary achievement, nine years in the

¹¹² <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/monde-65017635>

¹¹³ https://www.bfmtv.com/societe/les-mensonges-qui-ont-change-le-cours-de-l-histoire-les-supposees-armes-de-destruction-massive_AN-202108130001.html

¹¹⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2016/jul/06/chilcot-report-live-inquiry-war-iraq>

making¹¹⁵. According to the Watson Institute for International & Public Affairs, Iraqi civilians paid a very heavy price for the conflict and its aftermath. A study commissioned by the institute, which takes into account the medium- and long-term effects of war (water shortages, disease and so on), estimates that between 186,694 and 210,038 Iraqi civilians lost their lives between March 2003 and March 2023¹¹⁶. During the nine years of American presence, the figure stands at 100,000 victims. In financial terms, the cost of the invasion to the United States is estimated to reach as much as \$6trn by 2053, taking into account in particular the interest on the borrowing used to fund the conflict¹¹⁷.

America's failure in Iraq damaged its image in the Middle East for a long time, while leaving the country facing the instability inherent in any post-conflict period. This situation proved fertile ground for the emergence of the Islamic State. Unlike other Islamist terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda, the Islamic State in Iraq, which became the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in 2013 and later the Islamic State, has the goal of conquering territory in order to establish a caliphate there and impose sharia.

In 2014 Daesh seized the cities of Raqqa in Syria and Mosul in Iraq. On 29 June Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi proclaimed himself caliph and took the name Ibrahim. The choice of the title of caliph was no accident: it designates a successor of the Prophet Muhammad and confers on its holder the role of a religious and military leader whose authority extends over the entire Muslim community (or "umma"). On 5 July of the same year al-Baghdadi called on all Muslims to submit to his authority in a

¹¹⁵ <https://www.france24.com/fr/20111214-obama-retrait-armee-soldats-etats-unis-guerre-irak>

¹¹⁶ <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/figures/2021/WarDeathToll>

¹¹⁷ <https://www.latribune.fr/actualites/economie/international/20130314trib000754033/6.000-milliards-de-dollars-le-cout-total-de-la-guerre-en-irak.html>

declaration made from the al-Nuri mosque in Mosul, a site symbolically associated with jihad¹¹⁸. In a video entitled "The End of Sykes-Picot", the Islamic State declared its intention to abolish the borders "of Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, all the countries up to Jerusalem", in a bid to reject the various nationalisms, to undo the carve-up of the defunct Ottoman empire and to build an Islamic empire¹¹⁹. This territorial, even historical, dimension sets Daesh apart from other terrorist groups, which aspire only to spread the jihadist threat as widely as possible.

Daesh's territorial advance alarmed the international community, which responded by forming a coalition led by the United States and including many European countries, Australia, Canada, Jordan, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. When the coalition was created, Daesh held 60,000 km² of Iraqi and Syrian territory as well as 185,000 km² of desert¹²⁰. The Islamic State gradually retreated before the coalition's forces, losing the cities of Raqqa and Mosul in 2017. Daesh lost its physical caliphate in March 2019 with the fall of Baghuz, a Syrian town on the Iraqi border. The organisation's self-proclaimed caliph was killed by American special forces on 27 October 2019.

Although the terrorist group has been considerably weakened by the international intervention and the loss of the caliphate, its jihadists remain active in Iraq. Their capacity for harm poses a significant security risk around Baghdad, where they nonetheless come up against the effectiveness of the Iraqi army, the Peshmerga¹²¹ and also the Shia

¹¹⁸ https://www.lemonde.fr/moyen-orient-irak/article/2017/06/21/la-grande-mosquee-al-nouri-de-mossoul-detruite_5149064_1667109.html

¹¹⁹ <https://www.lesclesdumoyenorient.com/L-Etat-islamique-en-cartes.html>

¹²⁰ <https://www.la-croix.com/international/daesh-du-califat-a-la-chute-de-l-etat-islamique-dix-dates-cles-20240628>

¹²¹ The Peshmerga are the regional guards of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

militias¹²². The jihadists are far more dangerous in the governorates of Kirkuk, Salah al-Din and Nineveh. The area between these three provinces is in fact nicknamed the "triangle of death". The Daesh veterans who have dug in there are gradually managing to recruit and swell their numbers¹²³, raising the spectre of a resurgence of the Islamic State as the international coalition disengages.

Iraq's Shia militias are another source of instability in the country. As soon as Daesh captured Mosul in 2014, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani¹²⁴ issued a fatwa¹²⁵¹²⁶. In the wake of this fatwa, Iraqis of every faith and ethnic origin joined the fight against Daesh by enlisting in existing militias or creating new ones. Some of these had already fought against American forces and against al-Qaeda. The most powerful of these militias are Shia, which implies close ties with Iran. As one militiaman interviewed by the JDD put it, "the command is Iraqi, but our brothers in Iran give us all their advice"¹²⁷.

After the Islamic State was overthrown, the militias became so powerful that people speak of a "state within the state". As *Le Monde* has revealed, they enjoy political support, with members of parliament and even ministry employees, as well as media backing¹²⁸. All the militias are grouped within the Popular Mobilisation Forces (Hashd al-Shaabi), created in 2014 by the then prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki, in order to

¹²² <https://www.lesclesdumoyenorient.com/Ou-en-est-l-Etat-islamique-au-Levant-1-2-Une-organisation-toujours-tres-active.html>

¹²³ https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2021/12/PERPIGNA_IBAN/64139

¹²⁴ Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani is the highest authority of Shia Islam in Iraq.

¹²⁵ A fatwa is an opinion issued by a mufti, that is, a Muslim religious scholar, taking the form of a legal ruling on a question of the interpretation of sharia.

¹²⁶ <https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/gods-man-iraq-life-and-leadership-grand-ayatollah-ali-al-sistani>

¹²⁷ <https://www.lejdd.fr/International/En-Irak-dans-les-coulisses-des-milices-chiites-836257-3147359>

¹²⁸ https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2020/12/31/en-irak-l-emprise-des-milices-chiites_6064924_3210.html

supervise their actions as far as possible while supplying them with weapons and financial support. Although the government has theoretical authority over these armed groups, they tend to act outside the government's framework¹²⁹. Tehran has exploited the mistrust of Iraq's Shia community towards the Sunnis to establish its influence over most of these armed groups.

The most significant militias are the following:

- **Badr Organisation.** With 20,000 men, its origins go back to 1982, at the start of the war between Iran and Iraq. Equipped with its own political party, this paramilitary organisation is Tehran's oldest Iraqi proxy.
- **Mahdi Army.** Commanded by Muqtada al-Sadr, this militia has existed since 2003. Although financed by Iran, it is not Tehran's most loyal relay, which leads the mullahs' regime to criticise its nationalist agenda.
- **Kataib Hezbollah (or Hezbollah Brigades).** Entirely devoted to Tehran, this militia was set up in 2007 at the instigation of the head of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, Qassem Soleimani, to offset the excessive independence of al-Sadr's men. Since 2020 the militia has been led by Ahmed Mohsen Faraj al-Hamidawi.
- **Asaib Ahl al-Haq.** This militia was formed in 2006 following a split among Mahdi Army militants and has its own political party, al-Sadiqoun (literally "the righteous").
- **Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada.** Founded in 2013 by Abu Mustafa al-Sheibani, the militia is an offshoot of Kataib Hezbollah.

¹²⁹ <https://www.amnesty.be/IMG/pdf/mde1453862017french.pdf>

Since 2018 and the American withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, these militias have been mobilised by Iran as part of the "axis of resistance" to target American interests in the Middle East. They appear to be relatively impervious to the Iraqi government's instructions and to answer first and foremost to the Iranian mullahs. Before he was killed by an American strike in 2020, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, Qassem Soleimani's Iraqi lieutenant, was thus seen as "Iran's Iraqi messenger and emissary"¹³⁰.

After the fall of Daesh and the withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, Tehran put the Shia militias to work moving equipment to its other proxies, and they also targeted American interests on Iraqi soil. In 2019 Washington suffered several attacks on its soldiers or diplomats, which it attributed to the Hezbollah Brigades, Tehran's faithful relay. That same year a rocket attack on a base in northern Iraq killed an American contractor¹³¹. In response, American strikes on the Hezbollah Brigades' facilities killed 25 fighters.

"Soleimani made the death of innocent people his sick passion." These were the words with which President Trump greeted the death of Qassem Soleimani, killed by an American missile strike. Washington, which accused Soleimani of preparing "major action", considered that it had thereby "stopped a war"¹³². Although the blow was a heavy one for the Iranian proxy, American interests in the region continued to come under regular attack. From October 2023 to January 2024 more than 140

¹³⁰ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/leadership-and-purpose-iraq's-popular-mobilization-forces>

¹³¹ https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2019/12/30/risque-d-escalade-entre-les-etats-unis-et-les-milices-chiites-en-irak_6024397_3210.html

¹³² <https://www.europe1.fr/international/assassinat-du-general-soleimani-trump-dit-avoir-agi-pour-arreter-une-guerre-pas-pour-en-commencer-une-3940963>

drone attacks or rocket launches against American or coalition troops were recorded¹³³. Washington retaliated with bombing campaigns that inflicted heavy damage on the positions of the Shia militia Kataib Hezbollah. In January 2024 the same militia killed three members of the American armed forces in Jordan¹³⁴. Meanwhile, Iraq's Shia militias began launching attacks on Israel from mid-October 2023. Although they stayed on the sidelines during the 12-day war, Hayder al-Shakeri, a researcher quoted by L'Orient-Le Jour, sees in these groups' temporary restraint "a calculation driven more by the desire to retain influence than by the wish to open a new front". As Mr al-Shakeri points out, the militias "lack military capabilities, public support and a unified structure". The militias that belong to the "Islamic Resistance in Iraq" insist, moreover, that they will not abandon Iran. As one of their officials put it, "there is a time when the sword must stay in its sheath, but that does not mean giving up arms".

Point 4: Preventing Tehran from rearming its militias

With Hezbollah decapitated and on the way to demilitarisation, and Hamas caught in a vice by the IDF, only the Houthis seem to retain the capacity to harm Israel's interests and security. It should be noted, however, that this harm is almost exclusively economic, since, like the Iranian attacks, those launched by the Yemeni rebels run up against Israel's Iron Dome and the intervention of its allies. Iran, which on those

¹³³ <https://www.france24.com/fr/moyen-orient/20240123-irak-les-États-unis-frappent-contre-des-groupes-pro-iran-en-représailles-à-des-attaques>

¹³⁴ <https://www.la-croix.com/international/mort-de-trois-soldats-americains-en-jordanie-joe-biden-au-defi-de-riposter-20240129>

occasions revealed how far it lagged behind Israel militarily, is now in a position of weakness. This assessment must be tempered by some recent developments showing that the "axis of resistance" is still twitching.

A series of seizures carried out by various regional actors shows that Iran is still shipping weapons and ammunition to some of its relays. In Yemen, the internationally recognised government and some members of the coalition backing it, including the National Resistance Forces, intercepted a large maritime shipment of Iranian missiles bound for the Houthis on 16 July this year. It comprised 750 tonnes of cruise missiles, anti-ship missiles, anti-aircraft missiles and drones. The Houthis continue to launch air attacks against the Jewish state, as shown by the interception on 21 July of a ballistic missile fired from Yemen at Ben Gurion airport.

Furthermore, Esmail Qaani, head of the Quds Force, who was for a time presumed dead, travelled to Iraq on 17 July to meet the various militias within the mullahs' orbit. Citing an "imminent" Israeli attack on those militias, Esmail Qaani warned their leaders against possible infiltration by Israeli intelligence. While the Iraqi militias played only a marginal part in the "12-day war", they have been far more active recently, targeting in particular half a dozen oil sites run by American companies in Iraqi Kurdistan, according to the Kurdistan Regional Government. Other targets, such as airports, have also been attacked in the same region.

Finally, despite the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime, which allowed Tehran to move weapons and ammunition to Hezbollah through Syrian territory, the mullahs do not appear to have entirely abandoned this route. In June this year Syrian government forces announced that they had intercepted

a convoy carrying anti-tank missiles bound for Hezbollah. Despite the seizures made by Syrian forces, it seems physically impossible to monitor the whole of a Lebanese border some 400 km long with more than 130 smuggling routes.

These various developments show that Iran is taking advantage of the lull that followed the ceasefire at the end of the 12-day war to strengthen its various militias, which clearly indicates that it would be premature to regard the "axis of resistance" as in irreversible decline. This rearmament trend gives little cause for optimism about Tehran's real intentions and about the chances of reaching an effective nuclear deal, chances already badly undermined by the delaying tactics adopted by the mullahs' regime on this issue, a point we shall examine in more detail later.

Excluding Iran from the nuclear club

Will the 12-day war bring to a close nearly half a century of confrontation at a distance, or will it prove to be just another episode in this conflict, marking the shift to direct attacks rather than attacks carried out solely through proxies? That is the whole question for the coming weeks, as the world waits for a statement from the White House or a tweet from the hand of its occupant. The coming fall of the mullahs' regime? A status quo for a few years? A matter of no concern to the West, according to the doctrine of the most fervent members of the MAGA school? The following pages will try to make sense of it.

The attacks carried out by the IDF as part of Operation "Rising Lion" were an undeniable military success. By targeting the Iranian regime's nuclear facilities and missile production sites, the IDF sought to wipe out the

mullahs' nuclear programme. Israeli forces also went after the human resources playing a leading role in the Persian nuclear agenda, killing many scientists, among them Fereydoun Abbasi, a former head of the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran, and Mohammad Mehdi Tehrani, president of the Islamic Azad University. Senior military and political figures were also targeted by the Israeli army, including Hossein Salami, commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Amir Ali Hajizadeh, head of the Revolutionary Guards' Aerospace Force, and Ali Shadmani, a close adviser to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei¹³⁵.

It was highly unlikely that Tehran would welcome the call by the 47th president of the United States for an "unconditional surrender". For a regime whose main fuel is ideology, bowing before its intimate enemy, which it calls the "Great Satan", would have meant abandoning its *raison d'être* and renouncing its doctrine, a stance the Iranian authorities considered unacceptable. Moreover, a surrender by the mullahs would have amounted to an admission of weakness towards a population that is far from won over to the cause of the Islamic Republic.

The hard wing of the MAGA movement may dislike it, and Donald Trump may have made the primacy of the America First doctrine across every area of American policy, and especially foreign policy, a hallmark of his presidency. Even so, the consequences of the Iranian nuclear question seem to call for an offensive solution. Donald Trump eventually opted for an offensive solution, potentially putting an end to the strategy of appeasement advocated in turn, with very limited success, by the Obama and Biden administrations. After leaving observers uncertain about a

¹³⁵ https://www.bfmtv.com/international/moyen-orient/israel/infographies-iran-israel-sites-cibles-hauts-grades-et-civils-tue-s-comment-en-sept-jours-les-deux-pays-ont-basculé-dans-la-guerre_GN-202506200049.html

possible American intervention, the occupant of the White House struck Iran's three main known nuclear sites, Natanz, Fordow and Isfahan, in Operation "Midnight Hammer", launched on Sunday 22 June. During the night from Friday to Saturday, the Americans had taken care to create a diversion by sending a group of B-2 bombers, the only aircraft capable of dropping GBU-57 "bunker buster" bombs, towards the Pacific so as not to arouse Iranian suspicions. The GBU-57 is distinctive in that it does not explode on hitting the ground but penetrates beneath the surface to reach targets up to 60 metres deep. This is no small asset for reaching underground nuclear facilities, but it was not enough to dispel all doubts about the effectiveness of such a strategy, notably those voiced by the Pentagon¹³⁶ a few days before the operation, since the Fordow site is thought to lie at a depth of between 80 and 90 metres.

Meanwhile, a group of seven B-2 Spirit bombers was approaching the Middle East, keeping communications to a minimum and refuelling in flight. Before the bomber fleet entered Iranian airspace, an American submarine fired two dozen Tomahawk cruise missiles intended to weaken the regime's air defences, while an escort group laid down suppressing fire to neutralise surface-to-air threats. The B-2 bombers then dropped 14 GBU-57 bombs, each weighing more than 13 tonnes, on the nuclear sites at Fordow and Natanz. The Isfahan site, for its part, was pounded by Tomahawk cruise missiles. Once the operation was over, the "Midnight Hammer" strike group began its return flight to the United States. According to General Dan Caine, head of the operation, the "first

¹³⁶ <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/conflit-iran-israel-le-pentagone-doute-encore-de-la-capacite-des-bombes-gbu-57-a-detruire-le-site-nucleaire-de-fordo-20250619>

operational use" of the GBU-57 inflicted "severe damage" on Iran's nuclear sites¹³⁷.

Apart from a timid retaliation against an American base in Qatar, of which the United States had been warned in advance by the Iranian services, the mullahs did not react. A ceasefire took effect on Tuesday 24 June, ending the conflict that will henceforth be known as the "12-day war". It caused the deaths of more than a thousand people in Iran and at least 28 on the Israeli side¹³⁸. As for the Persian nuclear sites, the precise extent of the damage inflicted by the joint offensive of Washington and Tel Aviv remains unknown. In the hours after the operation, the president of the United States declared it "a spectacular military success" that had "completely and totally obliterated" the key sites of Iran's nuclear programme. The reality, however, seems more nuanced, for several reasons: the mullahs are suspected of having moved part of their stockpile of enriched uranium before the strikes, and the possible existence of secret nuclear sites remains an unknown. In view of these uncertainties, the Pentagon estimates that, although intelligence indicates that the targeted sites were "completely destroyed", the Iranian nuclear threat has been pushed back by no more than two years¹³⁹.

This period nevertheless gives Donald Trump and the West some room to neutralise the Iranian nuclear threat for good. In reality, only the permanent exclusion of the mullahs' regime from the nuclear club would durably reduce the capacity for harm of the heart of the hydra that is the

¹³⁷ <https://www.rts.ch/info/monde/2025/article/operation-midnight-hammer-les-details-de-l-attaque-americaine-en-iran-28921676.html>

¹³⁸ <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/guerre-contre-israel-les-systemes-antiaeriens-endommages-ont-ete-remplaces-affirme-l-iran-20250720>

¹³⁹ <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iranian-nuclear-program-degraded-by-up-two-years-pentagon-says-2025-07-02/>

"axis of resistance", and relieve Israel of the existential threat that Tehran's acquisition of the atomic bomb would represent. Although talks between the American and Iranian delegations have not officially resumed, discussions between the various parties are expected.

Two options are now conceivable: the signing of a treaty far more restrictive than the failed Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) of 2015, or a new large-scale military campaign, which Donald Trump does not rule out if it proves "necessary"¹⁴⁰. NBC News has indeed revealed that a more ambitious military option, spread over several weeks, had been put to Mr Trump, who nevertheless preferred Operation "Midnight Hammer"¹⁴¹. By wisely withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal in 2018, the first Trump administration highlighted the serious shortcomings of that arrangement. Concluded under Barack Obama in 2015, the JCPOA had several major flaws. Iran did undertake not to exceed the uranium enrichment threshold corresponding to civilian use, namely 3.67%, but for only 15 years. The 300 kg cap on its stockpile of enriched uranium was set for the same period. The inspections that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was supposed to carry out at Iranian nuclear sites ran up against the Iranian authorities' lack of cooperation with the agency's inspectors. On 12 June this year an IAEA resolution confirmed the international community's fears by stating that the agency was unable to determine whether Iran's nuclear programme was "exclusively peaceful"¹⁴².

¹⁴⁰ <https://www.euronews.com/2025/07/22/donald-trump-warns-that-us-could-strike-irans-nuclear-sites-again-if-necessary>

¹⁴¹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/new-us-assessment-finds-american-strikes-destroyed-only-one-thre-e-iran-rcna218761>

¹⁴² <https://news.un.org/fr/story/2025/06/1156391>

Taking all these factors into account, the best solution may well be a mixture of firmness and diplomacy. As I argued in an article published on the website of the review *Conflits*, an ambitious multi-stage strategy could be adopted¹⁴³. France, the United Kingdom and Germany, as signatories of the JCPOA, first had to trigger the so-called snapback mechanism. This has now been done, following the decision of the Council of the European Union on 29 September to reinstate the sanctions. Under the JCPOA, these countries had until October 2025 to reimpose the financial sanctions lifted when the agreement was concluded, and thereby to reinforce the international trade embargo imposed on Iran by the second Trump administration. It was imperative that the snapback mechanism be triggered as early as possible.

In a second stage, a far more restrictive treaty will have to be imposed on Iran. It would require the abandonment of any uranium enrichment programme, even for civilian use, the destruction of all the regime's uranium stockpiles, and also the destruction of its stocks of ballistic missiles, since these could be used to deliver a nuclear attack. Every stage of this treaty would have to be monitored by IAEA inspectors, who must be given the power to inspect at their discretion any Iranian military installation, not just nuclear ones, without prior notice. The provisions of the treaty would not be subject to any time limit.

Admittedly, there is a risk that the mullahs would accept this treaty only to avoid cooperating effectively. For this reason, the slightest breach of the treaty would trigger immediate military intervention by an international coalition formed by all its signatories, including renewed use of GBU-57 bombs.

¹⁴³ <https://www.revueconflits.com/faut-il-negocier-avec-liran-sur-le-nucleaire/>

The time seems ripe to impose such a treaty on the Islamic Republic, given an economic and military situation that is clearly unfavourable to the mullahs' regime. Will Iran, unable to defeat Israel militarily, seek to activate its regional relays in an attempt to rebalance the confrontation? If so, will they answer the call? Hamas and Hezbollah seem definitively incapable of contributing to such a strategy, especially the Palestinian terrorist movement, which finds itself cornered by the IDF. No doubt keen to avoid a resumption of American bombing that could give their local rivals an opening, the Houthis might prove hesitant if Iran called on them. That would leave the Iraqi Shia militias. Here again, it is not certain that they would want to risk being attacked by the United States coming to the aid of Tel Aviv.

The possibility that Iran might block or attack ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz has also been raised. This would be a gross error on the regime's part, since such a decision would deprive Tehran of the revenue from its oil exports. It would also risk antagonising China diplomatically. The gamble would be all the riskier given that Beijing, one of Iran's few supporters on the international stage, buys 90% of the oil exported by the Persian state¹⁴⁴. Iran's economic situation, moreover, leaves it no room for manoeuvre to embark on such an experiment. With growth almost at a standstill¹⁴⁵, inflation expected to approach 43.3%¹⁴⁶ and rising poverty, the Iranian regime's economic prospects look bleak.

¹⁴⁴ <https://www.france24.com/fr/émissions/dans-la-presse/20250619-pour-la-chine-washington-alimente-la-machine-de-guerre-au-moyen-orient>

¹⁴⁵ The IMF forecasts growth of 0.3% for 2025.

¹⁴⁶ <https://fr.iranfocus.com/economy/economie/19468-fmi-liran-connaîtra-une-croissance-economique-quasi-nulle-en-2025/>

Whatever happens, Donald Trump is likely to opt for one of these two solutions (that is, a new military intervention or the signing of a restrictive treaty). Although part of the MAGA movement considers him bound by the America First doctrine, and American public opinion is opposed to a long intervention in Iran, adopting an isolationist posture would carry an even greater risk. Failing to settle the Iranian nuclear question immediately and definitively would mean that it would resurface in a few years and substantially tarnish Donald Trump's legacy as president of the United States.

Countering the resurgence of Daesh

As part of his unification project, Ahmed al-Sharaa has announced the government's intention to integrate foreign jihadists into the army. These fighters, previously confined to the Idlib region, number 3,500 and come mostly from China's Uyghur minority. They are to form the army's 84th division alongside Syrian fighters. The decision to integrate these jihadists into the ranks of the Syrian army raises the delicate question of how to manage the Islamist threat on national territory, a threat embodied by fears of a resurgence of Daesh.

The origins of the Islamic State in Iraq go back to the war that lasted from 2003 to 2011. From the start of the conflict, Iraqi jihadists commanded by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and claiming allegiance to Salafism created the group Tawhid al-Jihad (literally "Monotheism and Jihad") and waged an insurgency against the Iraqi government and American forces. In 2004 they merged with al-Qaeda, giving rise to al-Qaeda in Iraq¹⁴⁷, also known as al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia. In exchange for

¹⁴⁷ <https://www.lesclesdumoyenorient.com/Emergence-et-enracinement-de-l-Etat-islamique-1-3.html>

his allegiance, al-Zarqawi, who would be killed in an American air raid in 2006, received funds and fighters¹⁴⁸. In January 2006 al-Qaeda in Iraq joined the Mujahideen Shura Council of Iraq, before taking the name Islamic State of Iraq in October 2006¹⁴⁹. From 2007 the organisation was weakened by defeats at the hands of the American army and Iraqi troops. Now led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, chosen as its head in 2009¹⁵⁰, the group moved into Syrian territory from 2011, where the chaos of the civil war was fertile ground for its atrocities. In 2013 the Islamic State of Iraq merged with the al-Nusra Front of one Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, giving birth to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant¹⁵¹.

Daesh exerts a considerable pull and manages to recruit terrorists abroad and bring them to Syria. Sharia permeates every branch of the system of government set up by the group, which seeks to come close to Islam as it was practised in its early days. The Islamic State went on to conquer key cities such as Raqqa in Syria and Mosul in Iraq. It was from Mosul that the group's leader, al-Baghdadi, delivered the founding speech of the Islamic State on 29 June 2014 and announced the creation of his physical caliphate. Al-Baghdadi thus became Caliph Ibrahim and aspired to rule over all Muslims. The morality police patrolled the streets to enforce sharia on the inhabitants of the caliphate, while the jihadists carried out attacks in Iraq and Syria targeting minorities and Westerners alike. The American journalist James Foley was executed on 18 August 2014 and the video released by the group.

¹⁴⁸ <https://www.lesechos.fr/2015/11/comment-daech-est-devenu-le-groupe-terroriste-le-plus-dangereux-au-monde-282622>

¹⁴⁹ https://www.irsem.fr/storage/file_manager_files/2025/03/daesh-alqaeda.pdf

¹⁵⁰ <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceinter/aux-origines-du-groupe-etat-islamique-9805445>

¹⁵¹ [https://information.tv5monde.com/international/dates-cles-du-groupe-etat-islamique-ei-en-irak-et-en-syrie-26835#:~:text=Cr%C3%A9ation%20de%20l'EIIL,et%20au%20Levant%20\(EIIL\).](https://information.tv5monde.com/international/dates-cles-du-groupe-etat-islamique-ei-en-irak-et-en-syrie-26835#:~:text=Cr%C3%A9ation%20de%20l'EIIL,et%20au%20Levant%20(EIIL).)

This murder triggered the creation of an international coalition led by the United States to destroy Daesh. The coalition brings together some sixty countries, including many European countries (France, Italy, the United Kingdom, Germany and others), Arab countries (Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Morocco and others), as well as NATO members such as Australia and Canada. The coalition launched more than 13,000 air strikes and mobilised 5,000 troops. Backed by the coalition, the Iraqi army retook the cities of Fallujah, Ramadi and, above all, Mosul. Raqqa was retaken in October 2017 by the Kurds of the Syrian Democratic Forces with the coalition's support. The caliphate then lost the town of Baghuz, its last stronghold. Having lost its caliphate, the Islamic State saw its leader killed in an American operation in the small village of Barisha in October 2019. Although the Islamic State has lost its physical existence, its ideology has not disappeared. The group is now active mainly in sub-Saharan Africa and in Greater Khorasan, notably in Afghanistan, where it is fighting the Taliban. Jihadists affiliated with Daesh nevertheless manage to strike on the European continent, as in the attack on Crocus Hall in Moscow on 22 March 2024, which claimed 145 victims. Daesh's influence is still capable of pushing individuals to act alone. These "lone wolves" commit atrocities while pledging allegiance to the Islamic State. Recent examples, such as the car-ramming attack of 1 January 2025 in New Orleans, are plentiful and make a stronger fight against the terrorist group indispensable.

In this respect, the recent decision of the United States, swiftly followed by the European Union, to lift the sanctions on Syria could be an effective lever for securing the new Syrian president's help in this fight. Following the commitment made by Donald Trump after his meeting with al-Sharaa, the United States authorised banking and financial transactions

with the Syrian government, the Syrian central bank and the country's public and semi-public companies. Investment in Syria is possible again, as is the purchase of Syrian oil products. In exchange for lifting these sanctions, Mr Trump obtained from the new strongman in Damascus a commitment to expel foreign terrorists from the country and to help the United States prevent Daesh from regrouping. On 20 May this year, a week after the American decision to lift sanctions on Syria, the European Union took similar measures. The assets of the Syrian central bank are to be unfrozen and the European financial system opened to Syrian entities. The sanctions banning sales of weapons and of equipment that could be used against civilians, however, remain in force.

The lifting of sanctions, intended to give Syria fresh economic momentum and at the same time to give Ahmed al-Sharaa's government a chance, is an important test, and care must be taken to ensure that the Syrian side meets its obligations. The first of these is the solidity of the unity project championed by al-Sharaa. The recent atrocities committed by HTS fighters against Alawites and Druze are hardly reassuring as to the new president's control over his most radical elements. The project to unify the armed groups, and the way it is carried out, should it go ahead, will therefore have to be closely monitored. If one of the minorities, such as the Druze or the Kurds, refuses to join the government forces, it will then be necessary to be able to support it and guarantee its security, for example by backing Israel, which already provides humanitarian resources to Syria's Druze and treats their wounded. The Kurdish militias are also a valuable ally and make it possible to keep watch over the former jihadist prisoners, who are no longer confined to the Idlib area as they were under Bashar al-Assad. Furthermore, the European Union could help Damascus train some of its

units in counter-terrorism strategies. The Syrian services should also be pressed to keep closer watch over the 84th unit, which will be made up of former jihadists. Finally, it might be wise to re-form a coalition on the model of the one that destroyed Daesh's caliphate, in order to prevent any local resurgence of the terrorist group, a threat that is very real.

Though keeping a low profile, the Islamic State is indeed far from having disappeared, and is preparing its comeback by adapting its *modus operandi* to the state of its forces and to the context. Although the number of attacks carried out by Daesh since the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime seems to point to a decline in its activity, these figures are only partly revealing, since they do not take into account the reactivation of the sleeper cells that the terrorist organisation has scattered across Syrian territory, as *The Arab Weekly* points out¹⁵². The government forces hunting down Daesh fighters, notably those of the 70th division of the Syrian National Army, most of whom have already fought the terrorist organisation within the US-led coalition, manage to neutralise a number of fighters but are too few to cover the whole territory. Moreover, Daesh seems to have understood that re-establishing a caliphate on the model of 2014 is, at least for now, physically impossible, and is adapting its methods accordingly. Islamic State fighters now opt for a strategy of blending into the civilian population, which makes them harder to detect. This was confirmed by a source quoted by *Le Figaro*, who said that the terrorists now stay silent "until the moment they decide to strike"¹⁵³. Other sources indicate that Daesh seized some weapons stockpiles after the overthrow of the Assad regime and is distributing them among its various cells.

¹⁵² <https://the arabweekly.com/isis-reactivating-fighters-eying-comeback-syria-and-iraq>

¹⁵³ <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/dans-le-desert-syrien-les-autorites-de-damas-lancees-dans-la-traque-de-daech-20250717>

The means mentioned in the previous paragraph could make it possible to bring the threat posed by the Islamic State on Syrian territory under effective control. As for its capacity for harm in Europe and the United States, the cooperation of the new Syrian government could also prove valuable, notably by providing information on Syrian or foreign nationals deemed dangerous who pass through its territory, so as to allow faster reaction and the tracking and interception of terrorists or potential terrorists. Direct, priority channels of communication would be a considerable asset in managing a smouldering threat.

HOW 7 OCTOBER RESHAPED THE REGION

7 October is a turning point in the history of the Middle East. This turning point has had consequences for Israel's political development at a time when the country has taken on a dominant role in the region (1); for the development of Palestine at a time when a first plan for the creation of a State of Palestine has been signed by Israel (2); and finally for the development of the whole region around a paradox: although 7 October halted the normalisation process between Israel and the Sunni petro-monarchies, it also strengthened their de facto cooperation (3).

WHAT CONSEQUENCES FOR ISRAEL'S ELECTION OF 27 OCTOBER?

Three years after 7 October 2023, Israelis are going to the polls for the first time, in the legislative elections of 27 October. The trauma of 7 October is still present, to the point that it shapes the campaign debate. However, contrary to what is often said, the debate is not about the personal or individual responsibility of the prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, but about his ministerial responsibility. He is the Israeli leader under whom this mass killing took place.

Much has changed for Israel over the past three years. It should first be recalled that Mr Netanyahu has partly achieved the three war aims he set after 7 October 2023: freeing the hostages (1), destroying Hamas (2) and ensuring that Gaza is no longer a threat (3). The last hostages were freed in October 2025 following the agreement brokered by Donald Trump. On

the second objective, although Hamas has not been neutralised, its expulsion from the Gaza Strip has been agreed and its capacity for harm is smaller than in 2023. Gaza, however, remains a security problem for Israel as long as its future remains uncertain. With two objectives out of three met, the Israeli prime minister therefore has arguments with which to answer the opposition's objections.

But 7 October 2023 has had a second, very powerful electoral effect. It is making it ever harder for the left and centre to ally with the Arab parties, which represent 20% of Israel's population and about 10% of the Knesset. The weight of the debate on 7 October 2023 forces the Zionist opposition to walk a political tightrope: condemning Mr Netanyahu's handling of events while refusing any accommodation with certain Arab parties that do not play by Israel's rules. Politically, there is a rift among the Arab parties: those that follow a traditional line of non-participation in the State of Israel, on the grounds that it is not their state, and those led by Abbas, which wish to take part in the state in order to improve the living conditions of Arab Israelis.

Finally, on the political level, 7 October has provided a new lens through which to view relations between Arab and Jewish Israelis. This new lens is ambivalent. On the one hand, many Jewish Israelis still feel that peace with the Arabs will never be possible, which breeds a kind of despondency. On the other, 7 October saw a mass killing that struck Jews and Arabs alike, which could foster solidarity built not around the Jewish people but around the Israeli people.

ONE YEAR AFTER TRUMP'S PEACE PLAN, THE LAST OBSTACLES

One fact bears repeating: the State of Palestine is recognised by 148 states around the world, representing nearly 75% of humanity as represented at the United Nations. Yet this state does not exist. Why?

The State of Palestine will not exist as long as two states do not recognise it: the United States and Israel. Securing the agreement of these key countries is an indispensable precondition for bringing the project to fruition. Since the international community has no means of putting pressure on these actors, a pragmatic approach in the form of a deal should be preferred. Such a deal can be concluded on the best terms only once the war with Iran has reached a lasting outcome, allowing the region to regain some stability. Other obstacles, such as the threat Hezbollah poses to Israel, will also have to be removed. This is what Donald Trump sought, and obtained, in his peace plan of 3 October 2025.

Nevertheless, the conflict with Iran has weakened the peace plan. Even so, if the conflict pitting the United States and Israel against Iran were to end on terms favourable to the United States, Israel and the Sunni powers opposed to Tehran, leading to the extension of the Abraham Accords to Saudi Arabia, other obstacles would still have to be overcome before the creation of a Palestinian state became possible.

The first difficulty that could stand in the way of the regional calm needed for a Palestinian state to be created on a sound footing is a security one. Since 8 October 2023 Hezbollah and the Jewish state have

been in open conflict, a situation that no ceasefire has so far managed to contain. The will of Donald Trump's United States, acting through the American adviser Tom Barrack, and of President Joseph Aoun's Lebanon is not in question. Both countries constantly demand the disarmament of the pro-Iranian Shia militia. Hezbollah should therefore confine itself to the role of a political party, leaving the monopoly of arms to the Lebanese government and to the official army of the Land of the Cedars.

The framework agreement signed in Washington on 26 June 2026 by Israel's ambassador to the United States, Yechiel Leiter, Lebanon's ambassador to the United States, Nada Hamadeh, and the American adviser Dan Holler points in this direction. Under the terms of this 14-point agreement, no "non-state actor" would be allowed to conduct military action. It is precisely this point that crystallises tensions in Lebanon, where Hezbollah, which still enjoys broad support within the Shia community and sometimes beyond, refuses to give up its weapons. The secretary-general of this Iranian proxy, Naim Qassem, considers that this "humiliating and shameful" agreement amounts to an "abandonment of sovereignty" and is "null and void". Getting Hezbollah to accept its disarmament in the interest of regional peace will be a major challenge, as well as a heavy loss for Iran, which could no longer count on this ally, a constant threat to Israel since 1982, when the first ties between the Shia movement and Tehran were established.

The second obstacle is purely geopolitical and comes down to two characters: the "E1" project. They designate a plan to build 3,400 housing units in the West Bank, east of Jerusalem. The project is so contested because carrying it out would cut the West Bank in two, into a northern and a southern part, making it almost impossible for a future Palestinian

state to exercise sovereignty over the West Bank. As the New York Times reports, Bezalel Smotrich, Israel's finance minister, is encouraging this construction, arguing that it would "bury the idea of a Palestinian state".

THE FIRST 7 OCTOBER SINCE THE WAR AGAINST IRAN: WHAT REGIONAL CONSEQUENCES?

As noted above, the third anniversary of 7 October 2023 comes at a time when the war with Iran is still under way.

Launched jointly by Israel and the United States, Operations Roaring Lion and Epic Fury were intended to remove the Iranian nuclear threat for good and to bring down the mullahs' regime. In nearly 40 days, Tel Aviv and Washington carried out some 24,000 strikes on Iranian territory. The objectives of this operation, however, were only partly achieved. On the one hand, the whereabouts of the 440 kilograms of enriched uranium still in Tehran's hands remain unknown. On the other, despite the killing of Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the regime is holding firm. The Ayatollah's son, the enigmatic Mojtaba Khamenei, said by some to be very seriously wounded or even disfigured, has still not made a single public appearance, but the Revolutionary Guards have tightened their grip on Iranian society without it rising up again.

Worse still, the Iranian regime now has a powerful new card, never played until now: the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, through which some 20% of the world's oil passed in normal times. By closing the strait, Iran has acquired a means of pressure on Western economies, a new weapon in its arsenal that Tehran does not hesitate to use.

In this light, the ceasefire of 8 April and the Islamabad memorandum of 17 June seemed destined to be merely temporary, so difficult does it appear to reconcile the two sides' positions. Iran wants neither to give up its stockpile of enriched uranium nor, still less, its new grip on the Strait of Hormuz, which the Trump administration could under no circumstances accept. The negotiations have also been punctuated by exchanges of air strikes on Iranian targets in retaliation for attacks by the mullahs' regime on ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz. Iran also frequently targets American bases in the Middle East. The list of countries that have suffered Iranian attacks in this way is long: the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Jordan and Iraq.

Faced with this new security risk, and with American protection that the countries exposed to it consider too weak, the Palestinian question has clearly slipped down the agenda of the nations concerned. It now ranks behind security, and behind the search for economic solutions to offset the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and the recent seizure of control of the Bab el-Mandeb strait following an offensive by the Houthis, Iran's proxies in Yemen, who nonetheless enjoy a degree of independence from the mullahs' regime.

This new anxiety about their security among states that thought themselves untouchable thanks to the protection of an overstretched Washington has two consequences: the diplomatic temptation of a rapprochement with Tehran, which has so far proved largely ineffective, and the conclusion of new alliances that are no more effective (Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkey, for instance, signed a strategic mutual

defence agreement on 7 August 2026). It is precisely in the ineffectiveness of this agreement, the "Mecca Pact", that the hope of extending the Abraham Accords lies.

CONCLUSION

The news from the Middle East is very dense, and what is at stake there, and its consequences, are not confined to the countries of this region, whose history is as rich as it is complex. The problems are many, some of them long-standing or even historic, and they require answers suited to the different contexts.

In the very short term, ending the conflict between Israel and Hamas and achieving a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians is the main objective. The current negotiations on the adoption of the plan proposed by Donald Trump should make this possible if they succeed and if the plan is refined as we propose. In particular, the international community must stand by the Israeli people as they mourn the atrocities suffered on 7 October 2023. The region must be pacified by continuing the normalisation of relations between Israel and the Arab states, leading to a broad alliance against Islamist terrorism that would also benefit France, which is fully engaged in this fight.

At the same time, the "axis of resistance" will have to be put out of action for good. This means demilitarising Hezbollah, overthrowing the Houthis and bringing the Iraqi Shia militias under control, but also a genuine strategy of containment towards Iran to ensure that Tehran stops arming and funding its proxies. Iran will also have to be kept out of the club of

nuclear powers. The only way to achieve this seems to be a hybrid solution combining a very restrictive agreement with recourse, if necessary, to military intervention by a coalition.

The threat of Islamist terrorism and that of political Islamism both call for a far-reaching response and cooperation among international actors. The recent "lone wolf" attacks show that Daesh is no longer focused solely on re-establishing a caliphate but now engages in global jihad, once the preserve of al-Qaeda. The road to a pacified Middle East is not without difficulties, but it exists.

By Edouard Chaplault-Maestracci, International Analyst at Le Millénaire. Antranig Kevorkian, International Analyst at Le Millénaire.

Contributions: Pierre Clairé, Deputy Director of Studies at Le Millénaire, specialist in international and European affairs. Matthieu Hocque, Director General of Le Millénaire.

Photo credits: Benjamin Netanyahu 2012, by U.S. Department of State, via Flickr and Wikimedia Commons, public domain building CC0 photo. الصورة الرسمية للأمير محمد بن سلمان بن عبدالعزيز آل سعود, by Saudi Press Agency, via Wikimedia Commons, licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.



Le Millénaire is a think tank specialising in public policy. It brings together around a hundred contributors from a variety of backgrounds (private-sector and public-sector executives, researchers, business leaders), each an expert in their field.

President: William THAY Director General: Matthieu HOCQUE Vice-Presidents: Gilles BÖSINGER and Olivier BODO

Director of Studies: Clément PERRIN Deputy Directors of Studies: Pierre CLAIRE and Florian GERARD-MERCIER

Communication: communication@lemillenaire.org Press: presse@lemillenaire.org

To follow all the latest news from Le Millénaire: <http://lemillenaire.org>

Legal notice: this report as a whole is subject to French and international law on copyright and intellectual property. All reproduction rights are reserved to the association "Le Millénaire"; reproduction of all or part of this report in any medium whatsoever is strictly prohibited without the express permission of the President of the association.